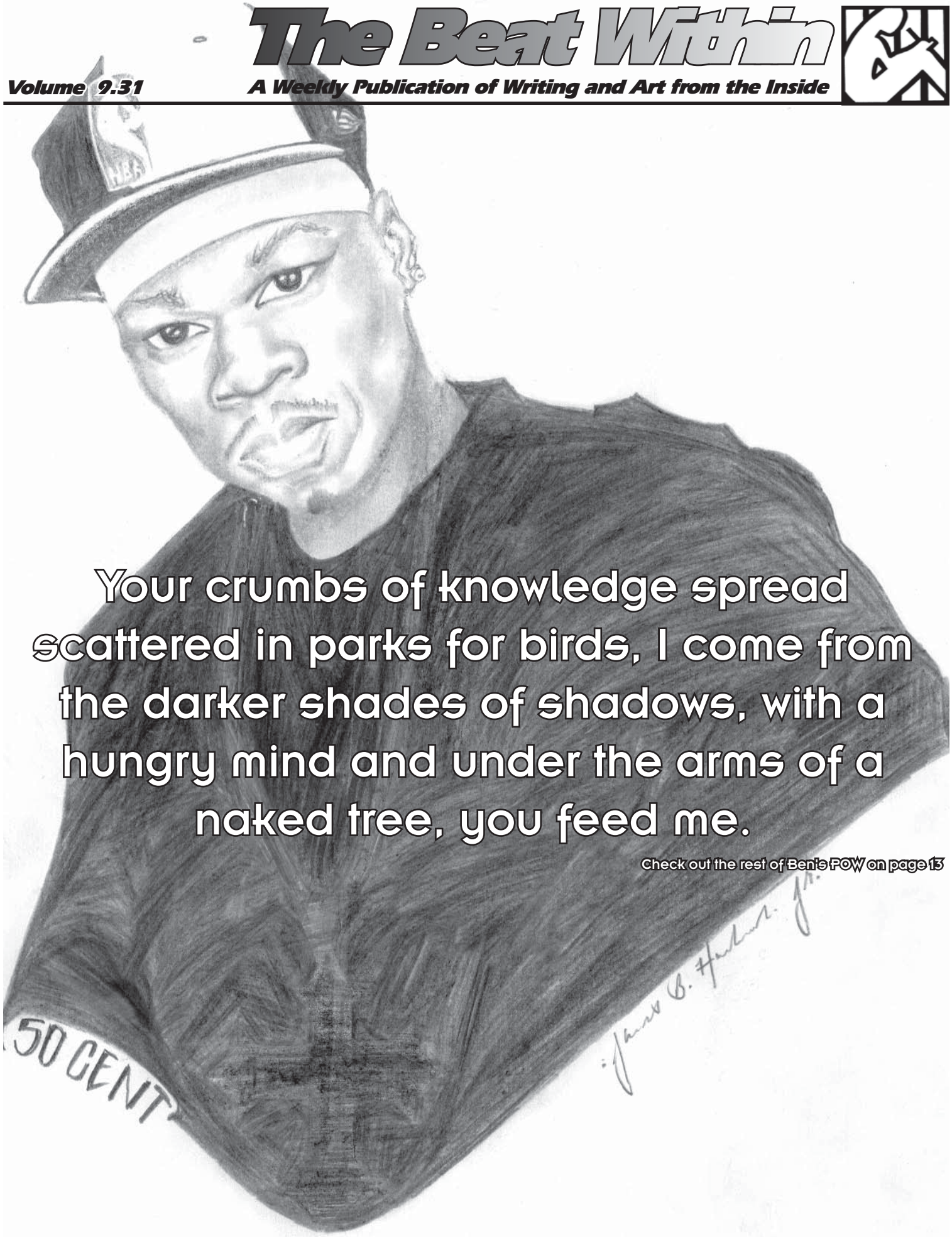
The Beat Within

Volume 9.31 — A Weekly Publication of Writing and Art from the Inside



Your crumbs of knowledge spread scattered in parks for birds, I come from the darker shades of shadows, with a hungry mind and under the arms of a naked tree, you feed me.

Check out the rest of Ben's POW on page 13

editor's note

How could we top issue 9.30?! Shhh, you know if anyone can it's us at The Beat Within, who never stop typing, editing, writing, meeting and greeting those who inquire, as well as questioning and listening to you juvenile hall writers each week. (Mind you, we mentioned only a few of our tasks).

Well, we obviously do not know what you thought of in issue 9.30, but if you have yet to read at least Jason Tréas' piece in The Beat Without, do it! We're truly satisfied with issue 9.30, and of course, this powerful issue, 9.31, which you have in your hands!

This editor just returned from a week off of work — so much to share, so much to catch up on — but what touched this editor most was two things, first off, this letter that was emailed around to about a hundred folks associated with the parent agency of The Beat Within, Pacific News Service, and which we'll now share with you:

Dear Colleagues,

Although I have never done this before, I urge all of you to pick up the latest issue of The Beat Within (9.30) and read the editor's note (page 2) along with the incredible cleansing piece by our own Jason Tréas, "My Reality" (pg.64).

As one of the few who had the distinct honor of being present in the maximum-security unit of SF Juvenile Hall (YGC) on the morning last week where Jason became The Beat Within personified, where The Beat's underestimated and under appreciated power was manifest, and where I watched my own unit's young "offenders" totally captivated for nearly two hours, I can only say that there are moments in life that are so transcendent, so significant, so epiphinal, so spiritual even, that they will remain indelibly marked on one's heart and soul forever. Such was the experience of being present for Jason's "homecoming" among those boys who sat transfixed as the reality of their lives stood before them and spoke a brutal truth from a place of respect that few of them (or us) have ever experienced.

This is not tooting my own horn, because I had nothing to do with it, but it is tooting the horn of The Beat. After more than six decades of activist adventures and social commitment — leading from my arrest in the 1964 Free Speech Movement (the first of half a dozen or more political arrests), through the jungles of Borneo (Peace Corps), into adult classrooms across the country teaching English to Vietnamese boat people and immigrants from around the world, to directing two national organizations in D.C. (National Moratorium on Prison Construction and The Death Penalty Information Center),to earning awards for writing for PNS and being published in national newspapers (USA Today, New York Times, LA Times, Washington Post, The Nation, etc.) — nothing, absolutely nothing, has made me prouder of the work I do than my small role in The Beat Within. Folks, it is an extraordinarily important thing that we do, and what happened in that small classroom inside that maximum lock-up unit in that juvenile hall on that Wednesday morning one week ago today was the quintessential meaning of The Beat, the epitome of what makes me so honored to be a part of this. Reading about how those young men were touched by Jason pales, of course, to actually experiencing it, but it's as close as you can come, and again, I urge you all to do so.

Your colleague,
Michael Kroll

It is not too late to get a copy of issue 9.30, just ask us, just write us! Simple.

As for the above note, written by our own Michael Kroll, we've been told only a couple people have responded to this emailed letter. Of course this is frustrating when you think that your own colleagues can't find a minute to send a short note. This work is relentless to say the least, and this is not to underestimate or say that their work is not challenging, 'cause we know it is. We truly hope that if a colleague of ours, outside of The Beat, is picking up this editorial note for the first time, and don't like the tone, we apologize for our frustration, this work is frustrating, you'll never know (unless you ask us). We thank you for taking five minutes of your time to read this editorial note, really. It's a start. Now, we hope you at least read a few pages of what's inside this fabulous issue of reality. This issue, damn, any Beat issue, will tell you how our writers see their communities, see the system, see corrections, see themselves, see the future! Damn, don't you want to know, or is it a bleeding heart, social worker, teacher kind of thingy??

Maybe only a few of us see the importance of The Beat work. We wonder if most people outside the circle simply do not care. We wonder if incarcerated voices are truly not the hot issue of the moment. Is The Beat getting too old? Are we boring? Were the incarcerated last year's hot item and this year it's . . .??? Or is it because we publish so many voices each week that it becomes overwhelming? We're stumped.

We always wonder why it is so hard to find that angel (kind donor) given the service we provide?! We're always looking too, obviously not hard enough. But we better not stop looking, because a few of us may not be able to keep the program going and make a living doing this work for much longer, given that we do live in the most f'ed up city in the country when it comes to paying astronomical rents and supporting a little family. Plus, the public school system is not great, so unless you are going to send them to a tuition-based private school, you're going to have to roll the dice on your kid's life/future. And we wonder why so many kids in public schools find their way to alternative school settings, to the streets as dropouts, or to the jailhouse.

No joke, San Francisco is not a kid-friendly town unless you have money. It's been this way for years, too, this isn't anything new. From the sound of things, it's like this in many communities we visit, or so say the young people we meet and the elders we meet. Why is it so hard to offer opportunities to our young? Some professionals and privileged folk may say there is plenty for young people to do, yet why don't these professionals go out and meet these young people in their communities and offer them enticing jobs that pay fair, and educational opportunities? If they did that much, maybe there would be less loitering, less graffiti, less low-level drug pushing, and drug abuse! Bottom line, we are scared for the future of our young people in the Bay Area, and The Beat, especially given our home base, where it all goes down, is so damn expensive. So we hand it to you families who make it happen for you and your loved ones.

On another note, one week is left (deadline 8/31/04) to accepting your written pieces for our Tenth Editorial Note Writing Contest. The writing thus far is great! We can't wait to feature these writers' favorite movies and the stories behind the movie pieces. Remember, we are giving away money orders to the top four pieces as voted on by The Beat staff, with the top prize being $100!

Oh, you want to know what this editor's favorite movies (had to put an "s" to movie) of all time are? Okay, without any explanation, they are ,off the top of the head, "West Side Story," "The Great Escape," "Bridge On The River Kwai," "The Godfather I and II," "Deer Hunter," "Raging Bull," "Taxi Driver," "Angels With Dirty Faces," "Public Enemy," "Repo Man," "The Band's Last Waltz," "Goodfellas," "Dead Man Walking," "Do The Right Thing," "Star Wars," "A Hard Days Night," and, oh, STOP right there, we can go on and on. So, we commend you writers who focused on one movie and told your story, 'cause it's hard.

Before we announce this week's POW (Piece of The Week) recipients, let's get down with The Beat topics, which we hope you'll write on if you're moved by them but haven't yet had the chance.

Our first topic was, "How Have You Changed? — In life, everything changes, including us. At the very least, we are all a year older than we were at this time last year.

How have you changed? Are you different today than you were a year ago? In what ways have you changed? Do you think about anything differently now than before? Like what? How and why do you think these changes came about?

If you believe you haven't changed at all, why do you think that is? Do you think staying the same is good or bad? Why have others changed while you have remained the same?

So, tell us how you've changed from a year ago."

This second topic was challenging for a many to write on, but the discussions went well. The topic is "The Camera's Your Destiny — The final words from the judge before you were, to your surprise, temporarily released back into the community for six hours were: 'If you truly cherish your freedom, take this video camera and show me through the camera's eye what freedom means to you. And if I like what I see, when you come back to my court room tomorrow, I'll grant you your freedom with other conditions pertaining to your case.'

No joke, you have six hours to show the court what freedom means to you, so what will you film, who will you film? How will you attack such a priceless task? No matter if you are already going to placement, CYA, or the pen'. No matter if you are fighting a murder case, a gang-related case, a dope case, or another probation violation, you all have this chance to win your freedom back through the power of the camera.

So in your words, describe what you would show the judge in your video footage that would determine whether you got your freedom or further incarceration. And tell us how you think the judge would respond to your footage."

Lastly, "Success is . . ."

Okay, ok, here are our primetime POW winners in no particular order. Major praise to Yana Bo, Bing Bing, Big Samoa, Sho Moe, Lil' Shann, Young Smokey, and Tydaillmighty from the 150 Crew. From San Mateo we have Friskie, Ben, (five from) Smokey, Black Ant, Adric and Alfred. From SF/YGC we have James, Diddy and Deep Speech. And lastly, we have Coda from San Luis Obispo. Thank you POW writers for stepping up in issue 9.31 and taking your writing to the next level.

It's time to move on, there is so much to share, especially about this editor's first-time visit to Walden House today, where we finally met the talented and engaging young men working on overcoming their vices and returning to their communities clean and sober. Over twenty young men attended the latest Beat program, too! We were particularly impressed with Johnnie, fourteen months into his successful program, and Shawny B., who is determined not to return to the community that he fears will only hold him back.

This issue goes out to you men and women who are determined to do successful programs, be it in Walden House or in a lockup. This takes plenty of discipline and determination. We're pulling for all of you to succeed. This issue also goes out to our good friend, Michael Kroll, for his incredible love and support for his work/our work here at The Beat. We are so lucky to have such a great colleague in Michael to work alongside. His presence makes coming to work that much easier. He's a gem, a treasure.

See you in the next issue, we hope.

The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our commuities already–we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

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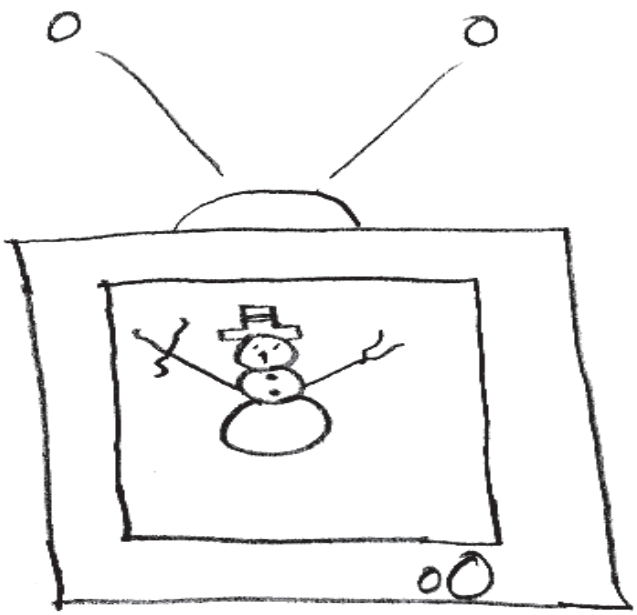
Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidence Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden Truth in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at

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Counselor's Corner



From The Beat: Sophia is the fabulous author of the following piece. She is the daughter of a counselor in Alameda County Juvenile Hall. Although she has never been incarcerated before, she saw The Beat Within and felt your words. Read on...

Life Without You

i wrote this for the people that I love in my life:
you
are not
always there when
i call but you
are always on time when
i need you here
so that is
the reason
why . . .
why . . .
why you
ask me why
i will tell you why
because you cry with me,
you laugh with me
and all around
me
I don't know,
my life without you
would be totally...
different!

-Sophia, daughter of 150 Crew Counselor

I've mastered the art of listening, and through listening, I've learned so much.



From The Beat: Comin' from the 150 Crew, Ms. Wadud is all that, and a bag of chips (Kettle Chips — Honey Dijon). She is one of the counselors that is really close to our hearts. She is a consistent contributor to The Beat. In this piece she puts it down, explaining how her girls, the girls of unit 2 have changed her. And as always drops a little bit of advice. We love Ms. Wadud, even though — she is hella stubby!

How Have I Changed?

I have changed quite a bit in the last year. I have gotten older in age and younger in spirit. Working with children has kept me young. I have a lot more energy, more patience, a whole different vocabulary, and more faith in a person's ability to change.

My taste in music has expanded. I've gone from listening to mostly oldies, "The Delfonics," "The Moments," and "Blue Magic," to lovin' "Jay-Z," "The Ying-Yang Twins," and "Outkast." I tend to "go stupid" when they bust a hyfy flow.

(Translation): I dance wildly as soon as I hear an up-tempo beat.

The kids say I'm "hella stubby" and my locks are "hella clean," and I go 18 dummy on the block.
(Translation): I am all of that and a bag of chips. My hair looks really nice. I'm very cool.

Aside from all these newfound characteristics, I am still caring and very concerned about the lives of my children.

When I say all my children, I mean all children, especially the ones I come in contact with at Alameda County Juvenile Hall. I've mastered the art of listening, and through listening, I've learned so much. I'm praying that the kids adapt God's listening skills. Also, so they can stop coming to jail, but until that happens, I guess I'll still be "going 18 dummy on the block," still hella stubby, and I'll try to help y'all as much as I can with the struggle you have with doing right instead of wrong. A mother never gives up on her kids, so I will never give up on you. Whatever you do, I'll be right here, "God willing," "praying," "listening," and "teaching."

It's my job and I love it!!!!

-Ms. Wadud, 150 Crew Counselor

Giving Back

What is success? For different people, this is different. To me, success means giving back to your community some time in your life.

I plan on going to school and getting into a career where I can help young people get off the street. Young people are powerful when they put their minds together.

So success, to me, would be going back to my community and changing a young person who may be going down the wrong road, and to inspire them to do the right thing.

Everyone stay up 'til next time.

-Diddy B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Yes, Diddy, young people (and old) are more powerful when they act together instead of working against each other. We can see you in the future working with young people who need the guidance of "elders" like you. Instead of boasting "I'm a leader not a follower," you're showing us that you're a leader with your deeds, which is where it counts.

changing a young person who may be going down the wrong road, and to inspire them to do the right thing

Changes

A year ago today I was probably running out of ice and trying to find some money to get more. A year a go I was hitting rock bottom, a full-blown tweaker. I weighed 120 pounds and out of mind. I was beating people up with chains, brass knuckles anything and everything to inflict as much injury on a person without killing them.

But today I do believe I am a changed person. I have over a year clean on meth, going on two now. I have caught up in school and will graduate ahead of normal. I'm back in here, but it is because of family problems not because of meth like last time.

I didn't think I'd make it this long without relapsing, but I did it. I think one of the main reasons is I recently had a bunch of friends start tweaking again, and being clean showed me what I was like and made me not want to go back down that road. I also had a friend stop breathing after smoking some ice that had something in it. That opened my eyes and showed me how dangerous ice can be, even if you get it from your regular plug. If someone screws up cooking it and you smoke it, that could be lights out. That's something I don't want. It's not my time to go.

I've made it this long without a relapse, I've got to keep going. I've managed to get a job, work hard in school to graduate early, got a girl I love and who would do anything for me, an all right family life — except my dad — a new group of friends that keeps me out of trouble, and I plan to keep it this way.

I'm about to be 17 on the 15th, and when I get home, my parents are asking me to leave and live somewhere else. I hope I can make it. I think living on my own will change me even more and help me mature further. I'm ready for the challenge and will think hard before I act, because if I mess up I can't run back to mom or dad anymore.

-Adric, San Mateo

From The Beat: Wow, Adric! The hope and promise in this piece is so powerful it sweeps us along like a rising tide. We wish you could bottle your sense of optimism, as well as your self-awareness and insights into where you were headed versus where you are now headed, and pass it around to every other youngster in and out of the Hall who cannot see their connection to the future. There's a lot of hopelessness in these Halls. You provide a powerful antidote to that disease, and we cannot praise you enough. If your parents don't want you now, it is their loss. The strength you reveal in this fine piece of writing gives us strength, and we thank you for that.

Know That You Are Something

Success is a goal that must be achieved
For anyone who wants to believe
Success is a way to free your mind
From the daily routine of time
Success is freedom from the world around you
Letting go the stresses that make you sad
Success is knowing that you're something
Even though others think you're nothing
Success is holding your head up high
To the heavens in the sky
Success is letting no one call you a loser
Because everyone is seen as a winner
Success is always having hope and dreams
That you'll soon be home if you know what I mean
Success is never giving up on yourself
Never being ashamed to ask for help
Success is believing in who you are
That your life is like a shining star
Success is a way to express your feelings
About how life gave you beatings
Success is overcoming your problems and fears
Letting no one rob you of your tears.

-Alfred, San Mateo

From The Beat: In a way, this wonderful list of what it means to be a success reminds us of a poem by Rudyard Kipling called "If." It begins, "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs/And blaming it on you," and it ends four stanzas later, "If you can fill the unforgiving minute/With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,/Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,/And--which is more--you'll be a Man, my son!" You could do a lot worse than be compared to Rudyard Kipling...

Prototype

Prophesized for destruction
Since the day of its creation
It's chemically fed
And surrounded by accusations
They fear its power
So a program they insinuate
Now it's programmed, misdirected
Programmed with self-hate
Can't control its reactions
Violence is its only friend
Lashes out its hate and anger
Its weapons are its hands
It's bound mentally
Now physically, too
Now caged and locked down
And doesn't know what to do
Released more confused
So confused it's not free
It's blind to the world
So it will never see
That, like a kamikaze,
Self-destruction was the plan
Do you know what it is?
It's the oppressed Black man

-Deep Speech B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: The only thing we can say in rebuttal, Deep Speech, is that you are a living example that it doesn't have to be — that an individual oppressed Black man is able to see, is able to understand, is able to control at least some of the rage, (and to move, even inches, away from the cage). We know that what you write is true for far too many young Black men trapped in an oppressive system, but we also know that some overcome, some move ahead, some soar above the rest. Education is the key to unlock your mind and clear up much of the confusion. It is our great honor to watch as you turn that key and open that mind. We can only imagine where that opening will lead you.

Pieces of the Week

I'd go outside in then rain and film the raindrops fallin' everywhere, because you don't get rained on when you locked down

Better Things In Life

I've been through so much at a young age. I started drinking when I was fifteen years old just because my patnas was like, "Hit that shhh for yo' birthday," so I was like "pass it." So, I hit the bottle and it was on from there.

I went from bottles to E's, from that to weed. Now I'm messed up from wanting to be like the rest of my patnas. I did not know all I was doing was setting myself up.

Look at me now, in and out of jail. I messed my life up wanting to be like everybody else.

My mom told me that she understood the first time, but now she doesn't know what to tell me. I go to her with all my problems. She can no longer help me. She told me all she could. I mostly went to her when I needed her. She came to all my court dates.

When I get out, I did the same thing. Now I'm back in the Hall looking at the same four walls, wishing I would have never hit a bottle, taken E's, hit the weed, shoplifted, sold dope, and all that crap.

Now I'm looking at a lockdown facility. That's what the judge wants, but I can't let that happen.

Damn, I want another chance to get my life together. Screw everybody else. That's why I'm messed up now, so screw dope, weed, E's, shoplifting, and all that crap. It's not going to help me get my stuff together, so screw it. I'm ready to be the girl my momma raised me to be.

I want better things in life.

-Yana-Bo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Good for you Yana-Bo. Better to figure these things out late, than never. Actually, it's not too late. This is good timing, you're still young, and you have your whole life ahead of you. Nv ow is the time to start making those positive decisions. You fell victim to peer pressure. Those folks you looked up to, sent you in the wrong direction. Start looking in new places for positive influences. Look towards your mother. Great writing and thinking!

Hoe Up Or Blow Up

Pimpin', you telling me to "Hoe up or blow up"
So I hoe up, not blow up
You talkin' about getting money
Telling me you love me,
You care about me,
That you gonna give me everything
That I ever wanted in my life
Pimpin', you ain't nothing!
You don't care about having me walkin' on the track
Up and down everyday
Givin' you my money
That I made, selling my body
Pimpin', your game ain't nothing
All the things I buy are with all of my money With my body
Pimpin', I'm tired of you
Talkin' about you love me and care about me
And that I'm gonna always be
Your only true one
Pimpin', my game is too strong for you
All those times I went to jail
Stressin' about everything I had done for you
You ain't never there for me when I was in jail
Pimpin', you ain't never write me
Or come to see me in jail
Pimpin', all that money I made
I could have gotten all the things that I ever wanted
In my life,
But all that time, I'm givin' you my money
And my life
For you
Pimpin', you ain't nothing but a loser
And not a winner
You ain't never been better than me
Pimpin', your game ain't stronger than mine
I'm too smart for you, Pimpin'
Pimpin', you ain't nothing but a loser.

-Bing Bing, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wow! Pimpin' watch out! Here comes Bing Bing. With more confidence than ever. Not to mention that this is beautifully written. Bing, you are making a strong statement here. We want to know how you intend to get out of this game? Are you already? What kind of struggles will/did it take? What advice would you give to a youngster falling into the same game of prostituting? Your body is gold girl — and only a king deserves your jewels!

Now I'm looking at a lockdown facility. That's what the judge wants, but I can't let that happen.

Freedom Rains

If a judge did give me a chance to show him my version of freedom. I would start filming as soon as I step out of that courthouse. Man, I'd sit in the back of my momma's car and just film out the back window. I'd get close ups on McDonalds and other restaurants. When I get out of the car I'm going to film the grass and trees, dogs, little kids, especially females, but you know, them scenes might have to be edited for the judge.

I'd film the whole inside of my house, rug and everything. Of course I'd film my every day life with my family, because family comes first. Then hopefully if it rains, I'd go outside in then rain and film the raindrops fallin' everywhere, because you don't get rained on when you locked down.

Then the judge would ask me, "Why did you film all this shhh?" I'd tell him, "I filmed all this shhh, because freedom is everything to me and all that little stuff like the rug and shhh is what counts... little stuff like the grass, riding in a car. It all amounts of life outside of bars, because you didn't get that little stuff in the pen and shhh." Then the judge would say, "Sorry your case is too severe, that it's better for society that you go behind bars for a couple of months, maybe a year or two," Man then I would stand up, keep my head up and prepare for what's ever coming my way, because freedom is everything... but you don't get everything.

-Big Samoa, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You are an excellent writer. You should think about going to college and majoring in creative writing. We think your movie would be powerful. You really express how much you miss the little things. Do you think being locked up makes you appreciate the small stuff? Why did you end the piece by putting yourself behind bars? Do you agree with the judge? What do you think it would take to prove to the judge that you deserve a straight release?

It's Broken

Time broke. Time was getting short for me. I was suppose' to get out this month. Everything was going perfect.

I had it all together — I had finished school, got two jobs, my court date was set for August thirtieth. I was the president for the student council, boy scouts' leader. I had it all in my hands.

But, if you remember one of my old writings, "Time's Slowly Crawling By" — you know that I've been battling the hands of time. It seems as if time has won, for now.

As time gets short when you're incarcerated, you start to get scared, worried, doubting. Me, I just started to jitter — my mind and body wanted to be free! My soul already has freedom, but still wishes to be on the outside. But my mind was tricked by the system. It told me, "You can't make it. You have nothing without me."

I am suffering from being institutionalized. I have been away from my home since November 20, 2002. I have been the model detainee since I entered this life. To me it's easy. I just do what they say, when they say; and they give me what I need, not what I want but just enough to get by.

I have become used to this. It's like I need this structured life. Sometimes it feels like I cannot have freedom — like freedom is for someone else. My whole time I have been searching for freedom, and I had it in arm's reach! And now who knows how long it may be.

Hopefully, it will be a short time, because I need my life back! My life is transforming into this institutional life style. I need to readjust to freedom. I just need a chance before it's too late, before I become truly dependent on this system in which I am currently confined.

I fight this system with every ounce of my strength, but this is neither beast nor human — it has no pain, no heart, no soul. How can I fight? Only by getting free and shaking it off and losing all the ways of the institution to reclaim my life.

To become again what I am, the Sho Moe I am today; to resume being Sho Moe P—, not Mr. P— of Juvenile Hall, but Sho Moe who writes with a passion, who works for The Beat, who loves his family, who will never surrender to this institution, not now, not ever!

Time set me back, but I am — never to be broken! These walls inspire me to become something stronger. When they try to contain me, my passion grows stronger — my passion to get free and to become a man of stature!

I know I have fallen, but it's not how many times you fall — it's how many times you get back up! So this is my stand. I will not let them hold me down, nor will I let time break me as it has broken so many others!

Now I am going to break the hands of time with my soul and mind — and no longer keep time in my mind or my sight.

Till next time, don't let nothing break you down, not time, not institutions, not man, not beast, not even me! All of my fellow detainees and convicts — stay strong! Bye for now.

-Sho Moe, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** As always, the enemy to fear most is the enemy we each carry within ourselves — within our own minds, hearts and souls. In this piece, you name the enemy within: institutionalization. It was as if the little bit of freedom from Camp that you worked so hard to obtain, those moments commuting to and from work on your own, was a powerful drug — that went to your head. And you made a bad decision. Some say, when we steal something, we're trying to steal the love we never got or fear to have lost forever. In your writing, you boldly confronted your most disturbing demons, past and present. "Time's Slowly Crawling By" portrayed the nearly unendurable stress of the last days of a lengthy incarceration. Did you know that most attempted jail breaks occur in the final months of multiple years of serving time? And, of course, nearly all get caught and end up doing more time. This sort of self-sabotage is very human. Yet heroes are human, too; and you heroically return to the task at hand — successfully transitioning yourself to freedom. You will put time from your mind. Good. But also the glittering materialism of the free world must be put out of mind. Of course, after you are free you will have things; but the essence of freedom is not about what you have — but who you are: Sho Moe, who writes truth with passion, works for the good of all, loves family, and refuses to surrender to the enemies of freedom. Stay strong. Much love and respect. Keep your head up.*

I just need a chance before it's too late, before I become truly dependent on this system in which I am currently confined.

Everybody makes mistakes, and everyone gets a second chance, but it's what you do with it. Don't mess up two times.

What Changed Me?

Well, I have changed a lot since last year. The first change I made was a bad change because I decided not to listen to anybody, not my mom, not my dad, not my PO, not even people that were trying to tell me stuff that would help me in life.

That was a change for the worse and I need time to get my mind right, but being on the streets wasn't getting my mind right. It was just messin' it up. That's why I'm in here now, but at this point in time, I got my mind right and I guess this was what I need. I know that you won't hear people say that they wanted to come here for a timeout 'cause they think they can get that timeout on the outside, but not me.

I needed this time to myself, but now I'm back mentally, so it's about that time to go home. But I can say this was a change that bettered me as a person 'cause I was really messed up in the head. I just needed someone to talk to me and tell me the rights and wrongs.

Everybody makes mistakes, and everyone gets a second chance, but it's what you do with it. Don't mess up two times. I messed up by letting stuff like the deaths of friends mess me up in the head because I felt like I owed them something. I keep seeing their faces in my head and thinking about the last words that they said to me, but now, by me being in here, I see that ain't the way. Me following in their shoes, and my mom loves me more than anything in this whole world, and I wish I would have listened to her when she was tryin' to tell me what was right.

-Lil' Shann, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** We're glad that you let the time do you some good. You learned a lot about yourself, which is good. Don't let the struggles get to your head it's part of life, you got your mind right now, so it's time for you to be up and home with your moms. Stay focused! What do you think the future looks like for you? Do you have goals set?*

Pieces of the Week

Fifteen Years From Now

What up, Beat! Man, today is Saturday, August seventh! We just got back to our rooms from lunch; just kickin' back, listening to some slow jams, waitin' for visits to be over so we can hit rec'.

'Cause I want to watch a movie! In here, that's really all I get to look forward to, is movie nights, visits, and, of course — The Beat Within! 'Cause I like to read what other people are going through. That way I know I'm not alone!

But anyways, since I've been here in "150" — I've been doing a lot of thinkin' 'bout how my life is now; how my life should have been; and how I want my life to be in the years to come!

Hold up — before I go into all that, I want y'all to peep on how I started to think 'bout life and all.

Well, every morning at breakfast in this unit, we listen to Moe aka Mr. Morris, give us a long speech on why we need to take charge of our lives, plan for our future, and think before we do something. Most of the unit looks at him like they listening, but by the looks on their faces, you could tell they daydreamin'.

Don't get me wrong, sometimes I do, too. But for the most part, I do try to listen, 'cause believe it or not — it's game he's speakin'! May not be street game, but it is game! But like I was sayin', we listen to him every morning, and I guess one day it started to sink in — 'cause I started to do a lot of thinking on the subject of life.

So one day in PE, me and the homie Fat Juan were sittin' down talkin' 'bout whatever; but mostly war stories, parties — and can't forget about females, 'cause that damn near ninety-nine point nine per cent of every male unit's conversation!

What Moe said to us earlier that week 'bout "where I think the unit will be in fifteen years" — popped into my mind! So, I asked Fat Juan, "Ay homes, where ya think most of these ninjas in here will be in fifteen years from now?"

He said, " Tell ya the truth, Smokey, I know for a fact, most of these folks in here probably be dead, dope fien's or in the pen'!" After he said that, we sat there in awkward silence, just lettin' what he said marinate in both our minds.

Then I broke it by sayin', "I wish and pray the best for you, homes." And he replied, "You, too, Smokey; you, too." Then we went to our normal conversation.

After that day, I didn't give it much thought till today when right before we came to our rooms, I was sittin' wit' my homie Ben. We was talkin' 'bout homies on the outs, when he started talkin' 'bout a homeboy that passed away at a very young age.

While he was talkin', I started to think of homies of mine and just people I met that died very young — at seventeen, sixteen, fifteen, fourteen, thirteen, twelve — how they never had a chance to live! And instead of us learnin' from thei' death and changin' the way we live, we do the opposite and continue what we doing in our lives; or we get more extreme 'bout it! Feel me!

Then I asked Ben what I had asked Fat Juan, "Where do you think these ninjas will be in fifteen years?" And he said the same thing Juan said — "Either dead or in the pen'." I then asked him, "Why?"

Ben: "'Cause, Smokes, most of them are too ingrained to change, don't want to; or they just don't know how."

I then said, "I feel you, homes. What 'bout you? Where you finsta be?"

Ben: "Shhh, probably wit' my baby mama somewhere raisin' my son I got!"

Smokey: "Ya won't be on the block no more?"

Ben: "Naw, I got a baby! Got no time for that shhh. Want to know where I think you'll be in fifteen years, Smokey?"

Smokey: "Go for it, homes! Shhh, ain't going to hurt, screw it!"

Ben: "All bullshhh aside, Smokes; you'll probably be in the pen'."

Smokey: "Screw you, homes! Why ya say that, ay? Hella put me on blast! On the real, ninja, what ya think?"

Ben: "Like I said, bullshhh aside, I think you'll be in the pen' — wit' no disrespect, Smokey! Reason for it, is 'cause you got, from what I seen since I known ya — you got a short temper! And you are stubborn: 'cause ya know right from wrong but still ya do things ya way, regardless of the outcome! I'm not sayin' I'm better than you, ay! But if ya don't change, you might end up gettin' shot like me, or gettin' killed; end up in the pen' — or pop a bad thizz and die or go crazy, 'cause look what pills done to ya so far!"

Then Ben got up and went to the bathroom. As I sat there, I was kinda mad 'bout what he said, but I knew he was right. It like when ya know something bad finsta happen, but don't believe it; then when it does happen, ya like, "Damn!" — left dumb-founded!

I sat alone, thinkin' 'bout what he said for a while. Then the homie, Mono, sat down next to me. And I asked him, " Ay, where ya finsta be in fifteen years?"

He said, "I see myself wit' a family and a house, kickin' it, ay!"

I was thinkin', "Man, Mono going to sound so sure 'bout it!"

Then Mono asked me, "Where you see ya'self at in fifteen, ay?"

I thought 'bout it for a second, then said, "I don't know, homes. I don't see nothing! I would like to have a family, nice car, good job, and a big house; but I don't know, homes. I don't see it!" Then we started talking 'bout flows and shhh.

When I came back to my room, my roommate, Culero, and I was talkin' 'bout some females. Like I said, females is what most of us talk 'bout. Then after ten minutes or so, he went to sleep.

So I was left ponderin' the words said to me today. I really don't want to believe Ben, but I know he right! And I don't want to die young! But to change I will have to leave all my homies and my city; so pretty much, I would have to start all over again!

And I'm not goin' to lie to y'all and say that I'm going to be good, and change, 'cause that just bullshhh' — and I don't like to bullshhh about important things like life! Ya feel what I'm talkin' 'bout.

I'm lookin' at a few years for this case. I don't know what going to happen in the next couple weeks, not even next couple days — so what am I gon' say 'bout what will happen in the next couple years when I get out? All I can do is pray to God every night and hope for the best.

What I do know is that I don't, wit' all respect, in the next fifteen years, I don't want to be like, wit' no disrespect once again, I don't want to be like Wardog, Sir Turtle and E-Money, etc., whom I been readin' since my first time bein' locked up in 2000 at Hillcrest! Just as I have, they started writin' for The Beat Within from Juvenile Hall, and now, as grown men, they are writin' for The Beat Without!

I don't want that! Wit' respect!

-Young Smokey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wardog, Sir Turtle, E-Money — they don't want that for you either. That's why they still write for The Beat Without, so you don't have to write from where they are. But you know, not everybody that writes for TBWO is incarcerated. Some are even working at The Beat, making money and living free — but still striving to help you see that you don't have to go all the way down the road you're on, the one Ben dropped word on! Maybe you felt mad, but Ben was showing you love — 'cause on the deepest level, love and truth are the same thing! And you know what he said is true, at least about you. We hope what he said about himself is true, too. We've watched him grow in consciousness, wisdom and self-control — but the world can be treacherous, as you know. But this much we know is true, Ben faced himself, his own temper and his own stubborn refusal to change; he fought a war within, and is still fighting — to win! Fat Juan told you true, and Mono knows it, too (but stubbornly clings to the false pride of reputation). Culero is in love, and sometimes that opens a window onto a world undreamed of; where change is suddenly possible. And you, Smokey, you're thinking; and you're praying. But what are you praying for? Are you praying you won't get caught, or are you praying for wisdom — and the willingness to be taught? Forget promises to change! Just promise to learn, then speak game — lil' homies are dying for it! And props to Moe aka Mr. Morris — that is good counselor!

Free Write

Sweet Beat,

It is with the utmost appreciation to recognize your genuine efforts of compassion and counsel to the trash of society (criminals). As visionaries of optimism, focusing juvenile delinquents in general, we understand this is one of many stereotypes biting at the heels of countless inmates. So as a friend in the fight for freedom, I come to think of the constantly increasing casualty count, in an economical war of adult systems.

With endless quotes of commissioners, laws of the senate, and goals from our favored political advisors, the theme for tomorrow would seem to be decreasing an almost peaked crime rate. But to consider such a crime rate's coverage of skyrocketing tax levels, the overall profit of incarceration, and least recognized, the criminal accustomed citizens who pave way for the groundbreaking of government headed insurance agencies. We're outnumbered!

Before I crush the hopes of every "what if" awaiting appeal, let me throw out a few questions. Have any of you ever wondered (less the fact you're a non-profit agency) why your funding comes from foundations, commissions, organizations, and the collaboratives of business and communities alike? Or better yet, where the government stood in financial contribution with The Beat Within? Now, I don't claim to be soothsayer or scapegoat who holds all financial encounters with childhood memories, but I can tell you this: the community based foundations are located in industrialized offices of a downtown business. Like us, they experience heavy commuting, and cramming of overtime, to support a family with similar problems to ours. They have felt the effect of crime and at the same time watched innocent children play handball in the puddled alleys of their jobs. With that contrast, backing a need for change, the only route seems education (such as The Beat), not incarceration!

Which brings me back to our fine government officials. It appears as though they are better at collecting taxes or Martini sipping in private resorts than they are at keeping Election Day promises. Well then, of course I am forgetting all of these wonderful facilities they build in the name of rehabilitation. If you'd ask me (other than that the occasional exception) incarceration does no more than strip you of self-worth, individuality and with the twenty-four hour a day care and instruction of housing security, destroys your ability to address life challenges upon re-introduction to society. Come to think of it functioning wouldn't be that important to a government who spends an estimated one-tenth of the accumulated gross spent on incarceration or other correctional services of each ward.

So where does nine-tenths of over five thousand dollars per minor go each month? It couldn't be in the yachts, cozy lifestyles, or fifteen bedroom summer homes of this country's trusty leaders, could it? Who knows — if they're lucky, incarceration might increase the leveled crime rate. But they're not bad guys, they just make the laws. So why not make a financial convenience of them?

Anyways, The Beat is a great program that offers support to those who feel alone in such difficult times. And as for me . . . I knew I would be arrested before doing the crime. What an idiot, you must all be thinking. But, I experience a lot and found that to produce such an array of perspective and opinions of my own, I must achieve the conquest of pain that we ever so carefully push from our day-to-day lives. Modestly, you might ask, and with good nature, I find to be the format of most editors: "Ben, you seem well-educated, your ideas original, so aren't there other ways for you to create these opinions without the struggles of legal confliction?" Agreed, I would answer, "The world is an ocean of ideals and each at one point sent crashing into a shore of confusion. Sometimes the only way to prevail is in the midst of corruption, lost at sea where the waters are calm, and I move in the direction I so choose."

But worry not friends, I control my freedom, and as of this moment, I am vacationing from reality (the world) which seems much more strenuous and back-breaking than the serviced tranquility of Hillcrest. And with that, with my love for you guys, it is simple to understand I have things under control — because I enjoy the delicacies of freedom, 'cause fresh air tastes better, and most of all because I refuse to be responsible for the collection of Louis Vuitton in the closet of a man whose bills are paid with my pain.

Epilogue: For the record, I am no anti-government activist and completely understand the necessity of a republic rule. For those of you who are offended, realize I am no more than an observant criminal, with hope for the future.

-Ben, San Mateo

From The Beat: Your brilliance as a writer — your grasp of language, your ability to weave together disparate thoughts, your penchant for flying off on a tangent only to weave the thread back into the greater whole — is undeniable. Yet there is a sort of denial we see at play here, particularly when you talk about your "vacation" from reality. The vacation you've taken is a no vacation at all; rather, it seems as if you've made a metaphorical deal with the devil. Yes, the real world is in countless ways more back-breaking and strenuous than the Hall, but the tentacles of the system are long and strong — what starts as a "vacation" can quickly become a harsher reality. You don't need to seek out the Hall in order to find a sea of corruption in which to prevail; there is plenty of corruption out here in the "real" world. Your indictments of government officials are pointed and at least partially accurate, but your criticism rings a bit hollow as it comes from someone who has voluntarily withdrawn from society instead of fighting for justice within it. None of us are wholly consistent in our efforts on the outs, but there are many good mixed in with the bad, and the good can use your help. As you know, criminals are not the "trash" you sarcastically refer to, but your vacation is tainted by the selfishness of taking county money for your care instead of freeing it up to be spent helping those kids in the alley. Officials will probably always find criminals to fill any open cells, but you need not prove them right by playing into their hands.

Saying What I Wish I Said

Bottled up inside are the words I never said
The feelings that I hide, the lines I never read
You can see it in my eyes, read it on my face
Trapped inside are lies of the past I can't replace
With memories that linger, won't seem to go away
Why can't I be happy; today's a brand-new day
Yesterdays are over, even though the hurting is not
Nothing lasts forever, I have to cherish what I got
Don't take my love for granted, for soon it will be gone
All I ever wanted was the love I thought I won
The hurt I'm feeling now won't disappear overnight,
But someday, somehow, everything will be alright.

-Black Ant, San Mateo

From The Beat: Not only did you say what you wished you said, but you said what we wished you said — and you said it beautifully. This is an excellent poem and we love the faith you have in yourself. You made it apparent in your last line. What encouraged you to write such a fantastic piece? Do you truly believe that everything will be alright? Even we have a hard time believing this sometimes although we know you're right. How are you trying to make it alright at this moment? Well, good luck.

Pieces of the Week

Cut

I know some of you cut.
I understand
I still cut
This is my story:
When I wake up from yet another attempted sleep cycle, my mother barges in with tears flowing from her delicate, porcelain face. The very sight of this burns my thought! I remember the smell of innocent bloodshed.

She informs me that my friend... no, brother, has died. The Grim Reaper maliciously cut the artery of friendship between us. I felt as if I were just ran over by the truck of truth. It pinned me down; I couldn't breathe.

It didn't hit me until I saw him in a brown suit, which he would never wear. His hair spiked wrong. I walked up and touched his head as if there might be a chance he's alive, that we'd have a connection. No, nothing but cold flesh. After the funeral, I walked to my house alone. I start running and crying like a spoiled child having a toy taken away from him. I want him. I need him. I'm in my house. Alone. Tears pouring down my face, desperate gasps for air and understanding left my mouth with no answer.

So much pressure built in my fist as I grabbed a razor my mother bought for when we'd move. I let it slide down my arm. A trail of released pain follows as the razor moves. It glides over my depressed skin and exhausted veins. I feel relieved to feel something real. Something concrete. Something that I know exists, for there is a big, red scar on my arm. That scar, along with many others, is all the good times we had. They will be there forever until I die and be with my brother from another mother.

-Smokey, San Mateo

From The Beat: We've heard so many stories about people cutting themselves, but never have we understood it like we do now. You beautifully wrote about a tragedy, which seems common for you. However, our response to your talented writing can't mask the extreme pain we feel knowing you feel the way you do. Why does the solution to your problems have to be so final? Why do you have to cut yourself to feel something real? Why can't you do a push up or write another poem? We've attempted to help you get through this torturous state of mind, but it seems like you want to think that way because you thrive when such thoughts are in your head. Is that true?

Time

As I sit in my room, I listen to the freeway off in the distance as people empty out their lives into the garbage, not knowing how little time they have 'til this time's up. They waste their precious times worrying about the gas prices and the elections instead of seeing their family, friends, and people who matter the most. They worry, worry, worry about everything, only knocking off the time they have until it all falls down.

Tick-tock.
Tick-tock.

They don't know how good they have it until they die. Even when they die, they still won't know, but their kids will, their friends will.,

Tick-tock.
Tick-tock.

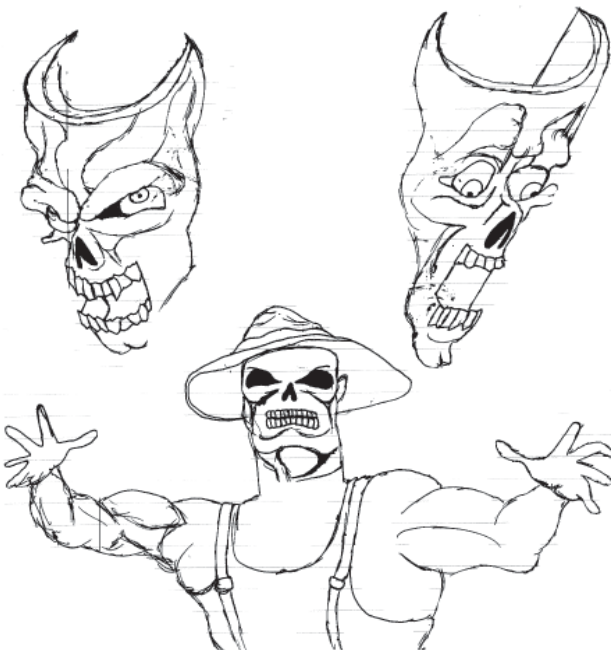
All of you stop bangin', stop smokin', stop being what the world wants you to be because you're just wasting your precious time on this Earth. The clock is ticking.

Tick-tock.
Tick-tock.

-Smokey, San Mateo

From The Beat: And the clock is still ticking as we speak. So what if we were to challenge you by saying take your own advice? What would you say to that? You say people don't know what good they have until they die, and yet you speak of suicide with every stroke of your pencil. So do you know what good you have now, while you live in this world, when these thoughts are present in your mind? Just something to think about.

I survive by writing, painting anything so I can get the thoughts out of my head in which I'm trapped, but I'm breaking free.



Survival

How I survive is unique. This is how I survive.

I survive by not worrying about my future. I don't have one. I don't worry about my past, for mine is too depressing to even think about. I just live day by day, by own rules.

I also survive by minding my own business for if I'm nosey where I live, you get killed, although that's not a bad idea if you had my life.

I survive by drugs. They leave all my problems. They spark my imagination and they keep me free, though none of us are, but I'm more free than you.

I survive by writing, painting anything so I can get the thoughts out of my head in which I'm trapped, but I'm breaking free.

I survive any way possible. I don't try to live to help myself. I help others by my experiences, my survival.

-Smokey, San Mateo

From The Beat: We're glad you survived because you paint pictures so well. You've taught us a whole lot and we appreciate everything you've written. We hope we taught you something also, because we hate receiving without giving. Does the way you survive change from time to time? What do you paint? What do you do when you feel like you've exhausted any means you have for survival? How do you survive then?

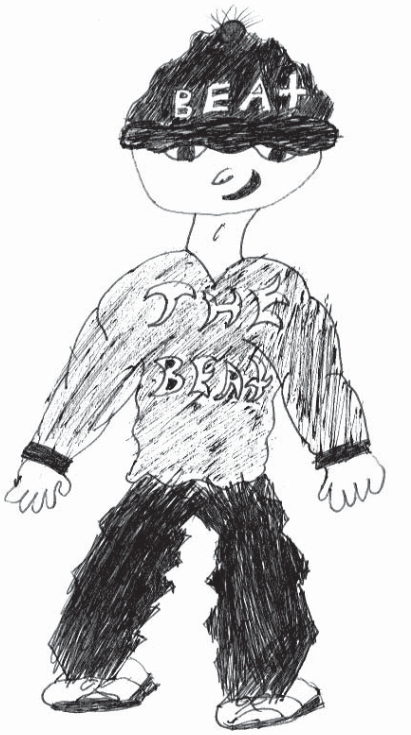
California's Minorities

Most gang related crimes
Are committed by brown males
Majority of black an' brown men
Ain't in school we in county jail
Doing time for undercover
Crystal an' crack sales
There ain't no job offerin's
So in a way we set up to fail
Ain't learned math from school
Learned from dope sales
History lessons from the oh-gee's
Book of ghetto tales
The park is our classroom
And lessons are war stories
Ain't eatin' sandwich for lunch
Homes we all drinkin' forties
Homegirls are joinin' gangs
Folks this ain't no sorority
This is the life style
Of California's minorities
Can't walk down the street
Wit'out gettin' harassed by police
Older sisters havin' kids so young
We the same age as our nieces
Ninjas stay usin' drugs
To fill in life's missin' pieces
Homie ain't shaved in days
But Dickies got creases
Can't pay rent
Got a fresh pair of Cortez
While dodgin' laser beams
Aimed at his forehead
Riskin' his life to bring
The family some bread
That the way it is
All the way up to ya dead
Ninja start to hate
Ya get filled wit' lead
That the only way
California minority's life end

-Young Smokey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You take us on a cruise through the lives of young brown folk born to lose, and it's ugly as a festering bruise — but it's just not true there's nothing else you can do. Yeah, we see when you say it's a set up, your world so dark and just won't let up; so you soak forties and get high in the park, risk your life till you sell to a narc thinking he was your next mark — and the system swallows you like a shark! But it's just not true there's nothing else you can do. You've got to break yourself loose or else you set yourself up to continue to lose! Come work at The Beat, you'll be happy and free, polishing your rhymes till they shine brighter than history — and spotlight what's yet to be!

**Riskin' his life to bring
The family some bread
That the way it is
All the way up
to ya dead**



Tomorrow

Right now, I want to die
I want to cry
I don't know why

Right now I want to go
Where I don't know,
But I need to do so

Right now I want to cut
I'm just a mutt
Who's a pure nut

Right now I need to feel
I need to heal
I just can't deal

Right now, I want to be free
I want to be me
I want to see

Right now, I feel no sorrow
There's no tomorrow

I can't pretend
My life will end
Tomorrow.

-Smokey, San Mateo

From The Beat: Right now we're worried about you. Right now we hope you don't do what you say you're going to do. Right now we want to understand how you feel. Right now we want to switch places with you so our desire to help you could seem more real. Right now we want to be the functional family you never had. We also can't pretend — you're our friend, and come tomorrow we'll all be sad. Because of that, we have talked about the feelings you express in your fine poems with people who might be able to help you through these hard times. We look forward to you keeping your promise to continue writing to The Beat from home or wherever you are.

The Pointless

The money we get
On a day-to-day basis
The lives we ruin
And don't remember their faces
The people we kill
The mommas we make cry
Seeing their sons grow
Then watching them die
Why — why — why
Our mother's cry
When the judge says
Twenty-five to Life
And they wonder why
Not why did you do it
But why is the judge
Taking my baby boy away
Well let me fill you mothers in
On why your sons
Will never see the light of day
The lack of attention
The careless fathers
The dissevering of families
And the hitch of revolvers
The problems
We think are unsolved
Until after the shot
One is all it takes
And look what we got
Lifetime sentences
No hope of parole
Now go back in time
To when life was so cold
Was it really that serious
I know you were curious
Seeing the look on a man's face
Delirious, sweating and bleeding
And begging and pleading
Coughing and wheezing
Gargling blood
Those are things you're not seeing
Those last breaths
In a young man's life
If you could see it firsthand
It would make you think twice
About killing a man
And hurting a mother
We should wake up
And learn to love one another
But think about things
That matter to you
Day by day
The pointless things we do

-Tydiallmighty, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We welcome back your lyrical heat, and the hard, real truths that you speak — 'cause it's what we need to see if we ever hope to change this reality. Can't pretend it isn't there by pretending not to care, or not for long; 'cause there's a price to pay for being that wrong. We've all made mistakes, but no matter what any one of us has done, now's the time to emerge from the dark to live in the sun — and be there for our children, families and loved ones! Day by day, live a new way.

pieces of the week

I Feel So Lost

I feel so lost
I don't know my way
Unsure if I will live
To see another day
I feel so lost
I don't know what to do
I can't hold on
But I can't let go of you
Questioning my future
Unsure about my life
Wondering if I'll ever be free
Of this grief and strife
How do I explain
That I need a helping hand?
Don't just read these words
And let me sink in the sand
What can I do?
What can I say?
How can someone
Not let emotions get in their way?
I write down all my thoughts
And my mind feels empty
Why did God make me?
Why did He send me?
Sometimes, it feels like the world's on my shoulders
Everyone's leaning on me
Sometimes it feels like the world is almost over,
But then the words come to me
I don't really know what to write
Does any of this even make sense?
To me, this poem feels so empty
So meaningless and dense,
But for some reason
Each word I write,
I feel a little stronger
So I'll continue to write
Since I'll be here for a while longer
I don't know
I feel so lost . . .
How many others
Must pay the same cost?
I wonder if you sometimes feel the same
Am I the only one
Who so often feels this shame?
I feel so lost
I don't know how I got caught up in the game
I always feel
Like I'm losing control
I couldn't see the consequences
Until they started to unfold
I've been coming in and out of Juvenile Hall
Since I was like thirteen years old
The room feels smoky
I can't really breathe
All of these restrictions are bringing me to my knees
Did I come here out of love
Or did I come because of hate?
I feel so lost
I don't feel like anybody can relate
These tears are falling
They won't stop
I'm on the ground crawling
I feel so lost
I'm unsure of which path to take
Where should I go?
What should I do?
I'm nothing
If I'm not with you
I've written about love
I've written about pain
I've written about myself
And when I was insane
This is the piece
Where I question my own thoughts
And that is when
The music stops
Trying to let go of my egotistical ways
But then all of my memories
Just start to play and play
I've been locked up
For too many days
The pencil and the paper
Are my best-best friends
They will always be there until the very end
They never let me down
They are my comfort when I'm sad
And they will always love me
Even when I'm bad
The paper listens
To what I have to say
I'm more confused
Every single day
I'm so lost
Help me find my way.

Dear Beat
I just wanted to say thank you for coming in and doing these workshops with us. I'd also like to say you helped teach me to express myself through my writing. Much love.

-Friskie, San Mateo

From The Beat: This is an incredible piece, and while you feel like you're all alone, the way you write about your loneliness paradoxically connects with all of us who read this piece. It's natural to question yourself, especially at this time in your life when you're honest with the fact that something about the way you've been living hasn't led you to where you want to go, but it's also in these questions that you are able to discover the foundation of your qualities that can lead down a different path. For nestled in among your lines of questioning and uncertainty are glimpses of a way out — the act of writing, and more importantly the things you write, suggest not only a way out of the Hall but a way into yourself. There is a line in your piece that reminds us of a line written in the Beat Without a while ago. The young writer, once a writer in YGC before going to YA, is now free and working with The Beat. He wrote about his friends, paper and pencil. We see you've met them as well. Even at your darkest, saddest moments, your friends can help you lead yourself to a better day. We all feel lost sometimes, but it's clear that you have the self-knowledge and insight to work towards finding your way.

The paper listens

To what I have to say

I Feel For The Youth

I really feel for us youth that's locked up in juveniles across the country. I have a message for those in the same predicament that I'm in. I feel y'all pain. And I sympathize for us all.
If you have the blessing to read this, understand that there is no shame in my game, but it is time to make a positive change. When you get out, use your brain to make that chedda-change.
We got to begin to care in order to win. That I-don't-give-a-damn attitude got us in here!
We got to MATURE and help one another because we are brothers.
NO MATTER YOUR COLOR, I'm talking about UPLIFTING others.
Don't become comfortable in these last days or history will replay.
Let us say:
This shall pass too, even if it doesn't seem to be true.
We will prevail, but not in jail.

-James B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Very, very powerful message. We hope everybody that reads this message will take it in. Even more, we hope you will take in your own words of real wisdom so that you can be the teacher you so clearly are.

You Feed Me

Humble as homeless, I live on your street.
I make love and life in the branches of a naked tree, cast shadows on your kitchen at five.
Like loins, my quarters secluded with blocks, endless of symmetric real estate and trimmed wisteria wrap pillars.
My shudders only flicker, so hold your eyes quiet watching winkles, the curious shapes in my window.
Bright mornings into the cricket eve I watch you nestled in arms of my naked tree.
Weary walking, suit creased to work, coming home too tired and slippers tossed to soundless sleep.
Dry spells wading in comfort waters of public pools, rainy days indoors and racket clubs where you kiss the ones you curse in cozy chairs.
Paying bills, investments in French import furniture sets you fear to sit on.
I sit and watch you from the arms of a naked tree.
You speak in mirrors and drink of Coke cans, you count money and stack coffee creamers.
Learning always learning I watch.
My silence is power, steel drive and strike when I wish.
I watch invisible slipping from shadows the standpoints and strongholds of political peasants.
I watch them all.
In the wave of a hand your trick life, fancy and funneled decisions turn facts, your house is mine.
I know what you need.
I know the money baits and with nets of my mind climb and capture your daughter's heart.
My words, soft hands, gentle harmless peel cotton covers off her fragile waist,
And still I watch from my naked tree.
Power, translucent, brims from my lips feeding children who love to learn.
Your crumbs of knowledge spread scattered in parks for birds, I come from the darker shades of shadows, with a hungry mind and under the arms of a naked tree, you feed me.

-Ben, San Mateo

From The Beat: Your pieces, as you may have gathered, present a challenge for us as we respond. You manage to combine abstraction and meaning in a way that makes the pieces both direct and slippery at the same time. In this piece, it is clear that you decry the hypocrisy of those who care more for their things that their loved ones, and that you see yourself as a sort of outsider to and an observer of the material world who can penetrate the numbness that pervades. Yet we are haunted by the lack of human connection that you feel to those who do control purse strings and mouthpieces. While we share your disgust with those who drown themselves in their money, we also recognize that their failings make them all the more human, yet you seek to simply usurp their space and live a purer life. Can you feed yourself, or do you need the object of your affection to feed you? What if the object of your affection is not cured by your touch?

Try So Hard And Get Nowhere

You guys never see me try,
All you see is when I fail,
So you lock me up,
Here in jail,
Like a family of apples and one is rotten,
Like this whole time I've been plottin' against myself,
Subconsciously,
Liquor and drugs are just a tease,
They get you high,
They make you feel good,
But eventually it's gotta stop,
You'll get harassed by a cop,
Man, I live in Templeton, that ain't the 'hood
Gotta do good
Gotta do great
Or I'll end up with a horrible fate,
Almost died twice in 45 days,
Lots of tears and the rest a haze,
Intensive care unit is where I was at,
Am I blowin' it or is it the luck of a black cat?
Got out in 5 days and I still wanted to get blazed,
Pneumonia and a collapsed lung,
I was on borrowed time and not havin' any fun,
Smoke too much,
Got too high,
Now I'm afraid I just might die,
Dazed and confused enraged in anger,
This time I'm in danger,
Beer before liquor,
Gets you drunker quicker,
Tuh that's true,
My mom found me and I was blue,
Almost gone,
Couldn't yawn,
My body was lifeless,
Like a bird without wings,
Who can't chirp and can't sing,
You're keeping me alive with the love you bring,
For every tear there has to be a smile,
For every year there has to be pain for a while,
But the same goes for happiness,
So I won't give up,
Because I'm gonna live for a while,
Breathe for a while,
And do good for a while,
And see what happens,
See how it goes,
I'm done smokin'.

-Coda, San Luis Obispo

From The Beat: Powerful writing, Coda. We're glad you're gonna sit back and breathe for a while, reflect on your lifestyle. We're curious if you've put yourself in your mom's place during any of this? If you were her, what would you do? How would you handle you and your hurt, and how would you handle your son? Would your trust be destroyed? What would you do to keep him alive, and what would you do to build a better relationship between the two of you?

**Almost died twice
in 45 days,
Lots of tears
and the rest a haze**

December 8th

This is dedicated to my mom who died December 8th, 2001. To those of you who still have your parents, cherish them while you can.

Mom
Mom, shhh ain't the same
It done changed ever since you went away
And I can never forget that crazy day
On December 8th in 2001
That's when my heart felt like it was shattered by a gun
Now I'm left with only memories of how we used to have fun
In front of the door is where I found you
You was dead and gone
I guess God came and got you early, took you to your new home
But He came too quick, 'cause now I'm stuck up in this world, all alone
All I can do is sit back and let my thoughts straight roam
Let them invade my dome before I go
Sick, I'm losin' my mind to this crazy shhh
Lawonda Smith, I'll always miss!

-Roy B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We feel the pain of your loss, Roy. You know, even when you get old, our experience tells us that the loss of your mother is like no other. Even though the pain fades from time to time, it comes back when you don't expect it to. Your love for her (and hers for you) shines through this sad but wonderfully written tribute to her. Now it's up to you not to let the world drive you crazy — and to do the things that would make her proud.

How Have You Changed

How did I change? I changed a year or two ago when I was sent to my brother in an island far away called Tonga. I was sent there to visit them for two years and when you go to the islands you could hit children there as long as they don't go to the hospital.

My brother used to whip me and stuff and I got scared of him but he didn't whip me badly — he just hit me with his fist when I didn't listen to them. I wanted to learn from my past when I was a kid even when I came back to America. I never wanted to go away from my family again. I was a good kid, never been bad unless it was school.

People hated me because of my face. I had fungus and they kept on teasing me. I tried to ignore them, but couldn't. I miss my family today 'cause I've separated from them again. For no reason, I get scared at night before sleeping 'cause my mom's not there to say goodnight to me. Can't say no more 'cause I might cry.

-Enele, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Very nice writing. You're very lucky to have had the chance to go back to Tonga and visit your family. As you get older, do you want to go back again? Do people still make rude comments about you? How do you deal with it these days? When you have children of your own, are you going to whip them? How can a lesson be learned without the spankings?

On My Way To Success

What's up, Beat? As you know it's me, Zoomungus. I want to talk to y'all about what success is to me. I think success is something like this:

Well, when I was young, something terrible happened to me and my siblings. To this day I have flashbacks. But, anyways, I think, for example, when I was out I was on a road to destruction. Basically, I was in a car with no brakes in it, feel me? I did what I wanted to do to hide the pain I was really feelin' at the time, so I kept smoking and drinking 'til one day life just hit me.

Then I woke up in tha Halls in YGC, kept going to court. First I had two strikes over my head, then tha DA threw me a deal, so I hopped up on it like a dog chasing a Frisbee. So now, to make a long story short, I'm on my way to the Y to do what I gotta do to overcome this madness and become successful, naw'mean?

-Zoomungus B5, SG/YGC

From The Beat: We admire you so much for facing the demons of your past that almost drowned you, coming up for air, and realizing that you want to breathe — and to have a successful future. We're sorry that you're headed to the Y because we know that, at least up to now, it takes a very strong individual to select the positive from that experience and resist the negative. But two things give us hope for you: first, the new director of the Y says he's committed to positive change there; and second, you are already on a positive path which will make it just that much easier for you to do what you need to do. Keep your eye on the prize, Zoomungus — and when you get there, keep us up to date on what you see, hear, feel, touch and do.

I Am A Good Man

Johnathan is a good man. He learned from his mistake ... I learned from my mistake and I am very sorry. God, please help me so I can do right about myself. You know what I mean, bro'. So my advice is to just do right, you know.

I want to be a judge and a basketball player and a football player. I want to go to college when I get my freedom, and get a job. I hope that everyone can get released and get a job when they get out. You know what I am saying! So just do right, you know.

But I will be a good boy, oh Lord; bless me in your own way. Just be good to me; oh Lord; please help me tomorrow. I just want a better life. So, God, if you hear me, please do right by your son. God, please help me, your son, in your own way. You know that I am really trying to do good for myself. So if you hear me, God, help me.

I already know how this system goes, you know. But I really want to do something good about myself, you know. And I don't want to let you down. You know, God, I will do right. You know what I can do, God. You know I have the ability to do right by myself. You know, Lord, you, out of all people, Lord, you know. Oh Lord, help your son, please, in your own way.

I know you want me to stay in here for a reason, but I can't take it no more, you know, God. But I wish I was out of jail and I won't be messing with the wrong people — because now I know to be myself!

-Johnathan, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Let your faith give you strength. God has a plan for you, and all you have to do is hold on and be ready to do your part. Continue to pray from your heart and know that all of your prayers are heard. Don't give up faith or hope, do your best, stay strong — and when you feel weak, hold on. You will be blessed.

I already know how this system goes

Interesting Choices

Young people do make some very interesting choices in life, whether it's belonging to a gang, tattoos about various things, tons of piercings, or the usage of drugs. All those things are just interesting ways for young people to express themselves.

Usually young people make the decision to do interesting things to themselves because they're curious. Many young people are dumb and haven't really experienced life yet. They don't really consider the long-term effects of using drugs, tattoos, and piercings. They haven't lived enough to know that maybe in a few years they may end up to be junkies or not get the job they wanted because of their piercing and/or tattoos.

I believe that getting certain tatt's aren't really all that bad, like traditional tattoos that are a part of your culture is, to me, taking pride in who you are.

Currently, I have a Samoan traditional band that goes around my left arm and I sport it with pride. I plan to get others like it, but would have it done in the old island ways, with a hammer and a shark tooth.

And not all drugs are bad for you because many of them are used for medical reasons. Yes, there are many drugs that can cause addiction and hurt many lives. But if it we're used to advance the treatment of the sick and the diseased, then may God help us all so that we may find a more efficient way to heal people.

-Alfred, San Mateo

From The Beat: You write very well, Alfred, and it's obvious you've thought about the things you write about. We have to say, though, that very few young people think about long-term consequences (which is why so many don't wear seatbelts when they drive, smoke a couple of packs of cigarettes a day, and think they can have unprotected sex). So maybe it isn't that their "dumb," but that they're young. The one thing we do own is our bodies (and minds), so we admire how people decorate their skin — even if it isn't our thing. (At the same time, when we think about having pictures put on our bodies with a hammer and a shark tooth, we want to scream in pain. So, to each his or her own.)

To Me, Success Is

Being yourself
Thinking within your heart
From inside
Taking all good advice
And showing
You have nothing to hide
Running the streets
But using your mind
One hundred percent
Being aware at all times
Using the world
For all your life hints
Going to school
Just to learn something new
Every day
Now being able
To accomplish some goals
And staying out the way
Staying mostly focused
Blocking out all
The nonsense and negative
Loving every mistake
As a lesson
Learning more on how to live
Keeping your head high
With all the confidence
In the world
Sharing your learnings
With all young
Men women boys and girls
Not focused on
The material things
Like jewelry or how you dress
Now this
Is what a person like me
Calls success

-David, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Since a journey to success demands progress not perfection, we whole-heartedly respect the lesson you're teaching. But you need to see that running the street will undermine everything else you're seeking. 'Cause the street will catch you blind for an instant, even with your mind one hundred per cent insistent on never slipping — everyone slips! It's just the way it is. The smartest and the hardest, even those that get the farthest, all fall. So rise above the street if you want to succeed!

I was betrayed in the end, so this is my fate

My Nightmares

My nightmares I hate them, my dreams I can't walk them.

I've been cursed by a devilish fiend, it seems my dreams are nothing more than figments of my imagination. No longer stressed in these situations, held up to reputation, it's just my sensation in me, but my nightmares don't scare me.

My nightmares I hate them, my dreams I can't walk them.

Some say I am the devil's advocate; I am my own man with my own prospects. No one will ever understand these feelings, like my soul's been refurnished by Satan.

My nightmares I hate them, my dreams I can't walk them.

I have no friends, I have no family, I am on my own understand me, hatred fuels my soul, revenge brings fire to my eyes, from now on I am to you Prince Satan.

My nightmares I hate them, my dreams I can't walk them.

I shall live an eternal life, son of Satan no regrets for the choice I have made it has been forced upon me and it shall be obeyed.

My nightmares I hate them, my dreams I can't walk them.

I was betrayed in the end, so this is my fate, you never expected it 'cause I was loyal as a saint. I am Prince Satan now, Judgment Day is here, and your reckoning is here. My nightmares never scare me. I am the one bears all souls for the mighty Satan. I am prince.

-Lil' Jepeabo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Lil' Jepeabo, your words send shivers down our spine. You are an excellent writer. We hope that this was a passing feeling. Nightmares never last forever...right? Wake up, it's time. You are so talented, and still young. You have your whole life ahead of you. Think; think about decisions that you can make in your life to make it better. What do you want out of life? You are your own man with your own prospects, what will it be? Where is your life going?

Midnight Seaside

Midnight seaside, in spray weather whipped and sun-bathed tents

Sculpt pouched sand piles palm beneath young bodies that grip, push, biting, and scratching struggles for air

Sucked through hinged hips that capsize under oceans of heat, heart pound, and pump against sponge-like walls skinned and scrapped filth of open flesh

Firm fist and legs stretched squeeze, pulse, and pour slop-puddled bathing in cream clouds and curved moon summer, we lay and wait for the energy to feel again.

-Ben, San Mateo

From The Beat: As you lay, do you appreciate the poetic images that skip through your beautiful mind? If so, explain how someone who feels so deeply can end up doing time. You describe situations with the deepest thought and feeling and yet you're in a place that takes no thought or feeling to reach. Can you explain this to us?

co-pieces of the week

Six Hours

Six hours of freedom
Don't really want to come back
All of my clothes
I could easily pack
Home passes feel so short
They are already planned out
But even myself
I am starting to doubt
Six hours is nothing
It is really just a tease
But I must do this
Because my PO I must please
I've been here for a few months
And won't get out for another two
And I'm kind of going to miss it here
I don't know about you
Six hours is a gift
One I know I'm grateful for
And I'm thankful for my PO
And I'm getting to know her more.

-Friskie, San Mateo

From The Beat: It must be so tempting, when faced with a home pass, to run — you do a good job describing that feeling in this piece. Yet you also come with the other side, a consideration of the consequences of running. Even more, you show that you're willing to look for the good in the bad of being locked up — grateful for your time, even thankful for the guidance of your PO. What are your plans for your home pass? How can you use your home passes as a way to prepare yourself for returning to the outs?

How Have You Changed?

How have I changed? I've changed in a way that is for the better. I'm not reckless any more. I now realize how stupid of me it was to constantly cut class, thinking that I didn't need school to live. But now I do know that I NEED school to survive out there in the world.

I've also changed for the better in that I don't think about weed, smoking weed, and "good" times when I was high because before I was blind to see that my girl was just hating how I was. I also was in danger of losing her for good, but back then, I didn't care.

All I cared about then was where's the next blunt coming from. One change that I'm most proud of is I know I spend a lot more time with my loved ones like my family, my dog, and especially my girl. When I'm with her, I feel as if I were high, and to me, that's one of the greatest feelings to me, and since I've been spending a lot more time with her, our relationship has strengthened ten-fold.

We now talk more, do more things together, and we're more comfortable around each other. Before, all we did was argue about my old problems. To me, I've changed a lot since being here. I still have a lot more room for improvement, but I gotta take it one day at a time for now.

-Tubz, San Mateo

From The Beat: We're happy to hear that you've made these changes. Hopefully they'll stick with you when you get out. We know it's easier to stay away from weed when you're incarcerated because there are less temptations in here. How will you stay away from it when you are released? What do your family and girlfriend say about you being locked up? Do you listen to them? What's the wisest thing your girlfriend ever told you?

Changed?

How have I changed?
Has it already been a year?
I've been steady smokin'
Not thinkin' about my career
My life is wasting away
It's already been a year
But it feels like it's been a day
I really need to change
Or did the change already occur?
Please! Please tell me
Because I'm not really sure
What should I change?
What should I do?
I overlooked my needs
Because I was too busy helping you
I honestly think change is in order
Being in here has been a waste of my life
Each day, I get older
Filled with more grief and strife
Trying to think
Of where I should start
I can't say I've changed
'Cause I don't feel it in my heart

-Friskie, San Mateo

From The Beat: The change doesn't occur — it is always in the process of occurring. You won't wake up one day and be "changed," but every day you can take strides towards changing. From our side, we can say that over the time we've known you, you have changed — you've come to question and understand yourself more deeply. You don't have to worry about starting, because you've already started. The question is, how will you continue?

My Mind Frame

My mind frame
Mixed with military mind games
Screw fame
I'll continue to run the streets with
No shame
The authorities don't understand us
We're bandits
Our mentalities are outlandish
And the trouble won't stop till we vanish
A lyrical psycho
I might go
Down the depth of a dark hole
And lose control
Sick to the point I might just lose, let
Rounds go,
But at all times, gotta keep my composure
I'm on a quest for war and I'm a front-line soldier
The battlefield got me stressin'
Runnin' through my mind is the question
Will I send the opposition to the
Opposite direction of heaven
Or does he have one more blessin',
But I'm guessin'
That the hands of time
Will one day handle mine,
So until then, screw those
Who oppose
And never trust them.....

-Vamps, San Mateo

From The Beat: Your word play got us wanting to hear more in the worst way — even though we think your approaching those "who oppose" in the worst way. There's no doubt that we're dazzled by your talent, and we'll tell anyone who asks that you've got major skills. But the intimations of threat that dance in your words make us sweat. Why not follow through on your view, and let the hands of time finish your rhyme? Those you oppose could be you, if things were only slightly askew. Though we don't want to hear what you want to teach, we have to admit we love seeing talent unleashed.

**I also was in danger of losing her for good,
but back then, I didn't care.**

Who Do You Turn To?

Who do you turn to when all is wrong, ya' ninja's gone
You write yo' mom, but she can't respond
Let 'em see me cry? Naw, I'd rather die
Rather have an enemy gouge out both my eyes
I live to die, set up to fall on this wicked land
Tryna get a grand, succession stands, but I fall again
Far from a man, so much to learn in so little time
My riddles rhyme for tha' simple fact I'm a kid wit' time
Trapped at tha time, but I refuse to be an invalid
A crippled being and just as hopeless as a little kid
My plan is so big, but as I sit in this dark cell
My heart tells wretched schemes of my hard tale
Too hard to tell, so sit right back and try ta pay attention
The remedy to tha game, you should be honored that I let you listen.

-Kayotick, San Mateo

From The Beat: We are very honored to read a piece written by a young scholar. It's okay to want to get a grand, but stay away from that fast dollar. It's funny that you say you're hopeless because when we look at you, all we see is hope. Your words enlighten us and your thoughts make us float. Keep on writing, we can't wait to hear more. If there were locked chambers in our minds, you've opened up the doors. Thank you.

Changed

I have changed in many ways. I have changed physically, mentally, and emotionally, and I'm proud that I made these changes because they are positive and they benefit me in the future.

Physically, I have gotten bigger, taller, and look older.

Mentally, I have developed a better thinking capacity that has enabled me to think before I act, and helps me see things in a more mature picture, and I am proud of that.

Emotionally, I have learned to have feelings for others. This helps me think about what will happen if I say, or do, something. How will it affect a certain individual and how they may react to what I said, or did. This also makes me think of how I'd feel if someone said, or did, something negative. How would I react? In my case, I am learning to triumph over anger and overcome it. It's a hard process, but it's worth the fight.

-Aaron, San Mateo

From The Beat: Keep on fighting Aaron, we see greatness in you. We know this is your first time in The Beat, but you're writing is so good it seems like you've been writing for us all of your life. You've made all these great changes, but there's always room for improvement (which happens when others learn from what you teach). What are some areas you need to improve? If you could be exactly who you wanted to be, who would you be?

Camera's Destiny

Once the judge gives me the video camera and I leave the courtroom, I would immediately turn it on because to me, freedom is just the way I live, so when I come back to that courtroom, I'm going to have six hours of footage on how I live my everyday life on the outside.

I'm not going to go out and find, or look for things that represent freedom. I'm just gonna go out and show the judge how I live because that's what freedom means to me. I'm not going to go out and do this or that, things I don't usually do. I'm not trying to impress anyone 'cause the way I see things is I'ma just be me, and you can hate it, or love it.

So, when I get out of that courtroom, I'm going to go on with the camera and live my life how I live every other day. I would go home and have breakfast with my family and just hang out for awhile. Later on, I would call all of my friends and see if anything is happening that day. Eventually, I would leave the house and get dropped off at a friend's house where everyone meets up at. Sometimes it's at my house, but we all meet up at someone's house and just hang out. We hang out a lot, just chillin', and that's what we do for fun. We all just have a good time, cappin' on each other, and it's all fun and games.

After awhile, we all eventually get hungry, so we go out to places like Wendy's, McDonald's, or Denny's, if we feeling like we got money. But when we go out to eat, it's basically just the same stuff that we do at a friend's house, except we just eating now. From the restaurant, we would try and figure out what to do next. A lot of the time we talk and get frustrated 'cause we never know what to do, but we either always end up going back to someone's house, or to the movie theaters.

I can't lie, though. When we go to the theaters, we rarely pay. We always wait for someone we know to go in and sneak us in. To be honest, I don't think I've paid for a movie all year. Movies are what we do when we don't have any options for the day, which is mostly every few days.

After the theater, we all would just go home 'cause only about two of us drive, and we got curfews, but what I do is call up my girlfriend to pick me up, and her and me just chill. You know, like quality time, or whatever. Her and me usually just chill at one of our houses and end up cooking food. I have a lot of fun just chillin' with my girl 'cause I get to show a softer side of myself.

After all is said and done, I relax with my fam. This is my life and that's what I want to show the judge, and she can hate, or love it. It's my life.

-Johnny, San Mateo

From The Beat: We admire your candor in speaking about what you would show the judge. Sometimes being real is the only way to go if you want something. It sounds like you had a life to enjoy. Would you change anything about your past besides getting locked up? If the judge saw this tape and let you out today, what would you do? What's going to be your first meal? Who do you want to spend time with first? We hope you enjoy your freedom without coming back.



My Refusal

I refuse to lose
and cannot be taken down
constantly picking myself up off the ground
recovering my life
from the things that went wrong in it
stressing and thinking
about what never belonged in it
recreating my life
in a whole new light
this time will I win
I think I just might
sordid memories
sick as can be
of people's actions and discussions
to and about me
smack this
horrible that
synthetic personalities
that I couldn't act
thunderous attitudes
that I shouldn't have to deal with
it may seem unreal
but believe
this is the realest
indecent start off of a young man's life
led to independent living that wasn't right
infeasible dreams of dope to big money
fed up with believing
and now it's all funny
that I even believed
that anything could be accomplished
determined to get paid
thinking who the hell could stop this
my diary is depressing
so for right now I'm resting
my refusal I'm investing
let's see if God gives me a blessing

-Tydiallmighty, 150 Crew

From The Beat: God has made you a blessing to all the rest of us willing to listen and learn, 'cause you've been there, done that and turned. Unfairness? — doesn't even cover it! You say it better: sordid memories, thunderous attitudes! The horrible words and actions that drive a young man to the street, make its dreams of wealth, revenge, success — taste sweeter than sweet. But it's a delusion, an extension of the initial confusion, the wrong that never belonged in your life yet was all you ever knew of; no one should blame you for how you grew up — though some always will. Now you're refusing to continue losing is more than good choosing, a good decision — it's an inspiring vision: Tydiallmighty with his roots in the dirt, rising toward heaven for all he's worth! Don't stop learning and teaching lessons, and you won't stop receiving God's blessings.

This Place Made Me Meaner

Yeah, I think I've changed. This place has changed me a lot. It's made me a meaner and more disrespectful person. I think that I'm an asshole compared to how I used to be. I used to say "please" and "thank you" — now I say "screw you" and then take what I need.

Camp has made me a worse person. I might be able to go home on the weekends, but I hate coming back. I hate having to sit in the roll call, and I hate sitting on a bench for fifteen minutes in the hot sun. Why do all that stuff if it only makes us more angry? — I think I'm changed for the worse.

I've been in this system since May eleventh of last year. I came in a polite person, and now that I'm "out" — I'm an asshole! I don't pick up after myself; I cuss at my mom; I make my mom do my laundry; I make my grandpa buy me cigarettes; I drink alcohol in front of my family — and I pass out drunk as hell in my bathroom every weekend. If that's not change, I don't know what is!

I used to have respect for my family. Now I just don't give a freak. I smoke weed, even though I get drug tested; and I ball my mom out when she's late to pick me up. As soon as I'm home, I go out and get drunk and sell drugs. I'm out till about ten o'clock, catch my curfew call, and go back out until the morning time. I don't make check-in calls; and when my mom tries to chew me out, I tell her to shut the hell up.

Basically, the Juvenile Justice System has made me a worse person than who I went in as. I'm trying to change more for the positive side — not for the system but for myself and for my family. I haven't drank on the last two home visits. I've been doing my own laundry, and I stopped selling drugs.

I'm trying to change it all, so when I do get out — I'll be the same as when I went in. I won't have to have my guard up and be an ass to everyone. I can be normal again. I can have a normal life. It's about time!

-Socrates, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The original Socrates who lived 2500 years ago, advised each of us to: "Know thyself." This piece demonstrates you lost yourself under what you describe as the pernicious influence of incarceration, but you also know yourself well enough to try to reclaim yourself — your authentic self, the one who could respond normally to people instead of having your belligerent, angry and lost, guard up all the time. More power to you for the changes you've made in the last few weeks! Keep it up! And once you're back to being you, keep getting better — that's you, too: who you can be because you have the heart, the motivation and the ability!



Dear Mamma

Dear Mamma, I'm sorry for all the pain
I put you through
I now realize that I've never really
Respected you
You are the only one that never gave up on me
You are my true homie
I'll always love you mom
And I'm sorry for letting you down
It took me this long to come around
I'll be home soon, mamma
I won't bring home no more drama
I promise I'll do better with my life
And I'll stay on top in life
I just want to say I'm sorry and I love you.

-Prince Charming, San Mateo

From The Beat: So your paying a tribute to the wonderful woman that gave birth to you. If you're Prince Charming, you know what that makes your mother? Have you told her all these heartfelt things? If so, what was her response? If not, why? It takes a big man to pay respects to his mother, so we are grateful to hear you doing so.

When You

When you look at me, what do you see?
When you hear me, what do you think?
Do you only pay attention to the bad stuff?
Is that why you're not there when times for me get rough?
Too many people in my life expect so much even when I can only do a little bit,
And I know that when I mess up it makes you sick,
So why can't you just try to be there when I need you?
Stop thinking I'm lying, when I'm really telling the truth.
You have to help, because things are getting hectic,
I feel like life is testing,
Just to see how far I can be took before I fall,
But it's really not life at all,
It's you and your judgments and comments,
And also myself for letting you put me through all this torment,
But I'm not gonna let that hold me down,
And hopefully when you see me again,
Your bad feelings about me will get turned upside down.

-J-Boogie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is a nice piece. Let people know who you really are — don't let them prejudge you. Tell us about that good stuff. We can see that you are sincere. It's too bad that some people can't see past Juvenile Hall. Life tests us sometimes and it's rough. But, it also functions as an opportunity to prove ourselves. You'll make it past this rough time. Show everyone that doubts you, who you really are, what kind of person you can be.

Why???

Why is the world round?
And why are we bound
To live life the way we do
And why is one plus one, two?
Why are we stuck on the ground?
Why haven't we found
A cure to the worst diseases?
How come pain pleases
Me so much? I love doing it
Why is it the thing to do?
Why does everyone hate?
We all are the same physically
With the same insides as everyone else
So why?
Why don't we fly
Like the birds do?
We aren't as free as we think we are
How come it is so far
From here to there?
Why can't we be everywhere
And why don't we care
About one another
And treat one another like a brother?
We need to be the ones
That makes life more fun
And not so feared
Why do people think I'm weird?

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Interesting piece. We believe that deep down you know the answers to all of your questions. Can you try and improve the things you aren't happy with in your own life? How can you make it so that your future is a bright one? Never mind what other people think — just be proud of who you are.

Freedom In My Eyes

The camera's your destiny: I would show the judge that my family and the star in my heart, my grandma and how much joy and love there is when I'm with her.

I think freedom is being able to be with your family and loved ones because as of right now, my father has just hurt his back really bad and might need surgery. And my mom has just had got a piece of her liver tooken out and my grandma needs me at home.

I have never really realized the time I was wasting until it was taken away from me. I quote the words from Tupac: "These people just don't understand the precious time they wasting". Because my family really needs me right now. My dad has to go on disability and there are bills to be paid and they don't pay themselves.

I wish I never got convicted. I should be on the outs helping my family. I wouldn't need six hours; it wouldn't only take one to show you what freedom is in my eyes.

-Danny Boy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This piece is really moving. It's frustrating not being able to be there for your family but it seems like incarceration has helped you figure out what's important in your life. What are you going to do to help your family when you get out? How can you do from where you sit to give them a little bit of comfort?

I'm not gonna let that hold me down

Think

What are you thinking when you do wrong? Are you thinking of the time you will be locked up if you get caught? Are you thinking of the people you will hurt because of your actions? These are things we have to think about before we do what we do.

What do you choose to do? Do you walk away from your friends when they ask you to do wrong with them? Do you tell them, "No, I can't do this because it's wrong" or do you go with them? A lot of times, we as youth fall into peer pressure. Think. When you get caught, is your friend going to go to court for you? Will your friend get you out the Hall? Will your friend take responsibility for his/her wrong doings?

Well, I would! Straight up, considering the fact that I don't even like the thought of somebody being locked away for something they did not do! But, then again, a person is not your friend at all if they ask, or lead you into something wrong...

Word to the wise, you will realize your own dreams by your own efforts.

-Vincent, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You are a wise man Vincent. Did you fall into peer pressure to get where you're at? Teach your peers what you learned and what you are learning 'cause they might listen to you more than anybody else. If you could turn back the hands of time, how would you go about things differently?

Think. When you get caught, is your friend going to go to court for you?

co-pieces of the week

Missing My Angel

You are a special person that left me
God took you away from me
For a special purpose
I miss you so much that I cry at night
Thinking about you kills me softly inside
But I know that we all have to go one day
As hard as it seems
It might be my day to leave this world
I hide my feelings
To show I am strong
'Cause I know I have a higher source up above
God has put his salvation into my soul
To cradle my weak heart
My angel, you will always be
My special love that will never fail
But till the day,
God has given me my mission to complete
I will love our short memories that we share
Till the day we meet again.
RIP Antwan

-Shavalier, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thank you for sharing this beautiful perspective with us. Dying is a part of life. And we do miss those that are gone. But one thing we always have to remember is, we all have purpose. Even those that we can't see or hear; those that are no longer with us serve a purpose. To all those that are gone – 'till the day we meet again'.

success is working in a profession, that you wanted to since you were a kid

Mind Your Own Business

I've changed for the best in my interest, and changed for the worst interest, for the system. I've disciplined myself by keeping my anger down, being real mellow. About six months ago, I would've took off on a lot of people, but now I'm just being cool, feel me? I'll let the next ninja approach me with some talkin' smack, and then whoop him.

The system doesn't like this change because they want me to act a fool. I could do that real easily, but how is that going to benefit me? All it's gonna do is put another charge on me and I already got enough of those, and, plus more time. You see, they would rather see me and you in here for as long as possible because to them, we're just another paycheck for them, so at the end of the month, they can buy their dope and prostitutes and just give them another Mercedes Benz, or Cadillac, you feel?

Check it out. I just mind my own business until you try to get involved in my business, and that's when my old self comes into play, so for everybody, just mind their own business.

-Big Samoa, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That's good that you have made a change to keep yourself out of trouble. Since you've made such a significant change, do you think incarceration was a good thing for you? Why do you think other people never benefit from being locked up? We know you can stay outta jail. Forget about everybody else that's not important. Keep doing what you doing; keep your head up!

My Success

Success is ... success to me is, or my definition of success is doing something you like to do, an you're happy. My definition of success is me and my family, not exactly rich, but able to have thing's we want and all that we need. Being successful to me is when you're able to take trips, or vacations, and don't have to worry about how much money you're spending on it.

My definition of success is doing what you want to do. Another one of my definitions of success is working in a profession, that you wanted to since you were a kid. I have a infinite amount of examples of success, but that would take forever, I can list a few more though.

Another example of success, to me is being able to say to your family, pack everything you cherish, or want to keep, 'cause we're starting over and moving to a new city. No looking back. What I have to do, to say that I'm successful is get out of this place and get me a job so I can take care of my newborn son, who I love so dearly.

That's gone be my success, what about you.

-Lil' Wody, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We feel your definition of success. We respect how much you value your family and that you want to take responsibility for your son. Do you have a plan for reaching your success? How do you want to raise your son? What kind of life lessons do you want to teach him?

Camera's Destiny

I cherish my freedom, but not until I lost it. Now given the chance to record for six hours to give the judge my perception, I'd show him all the good things I had good for me.

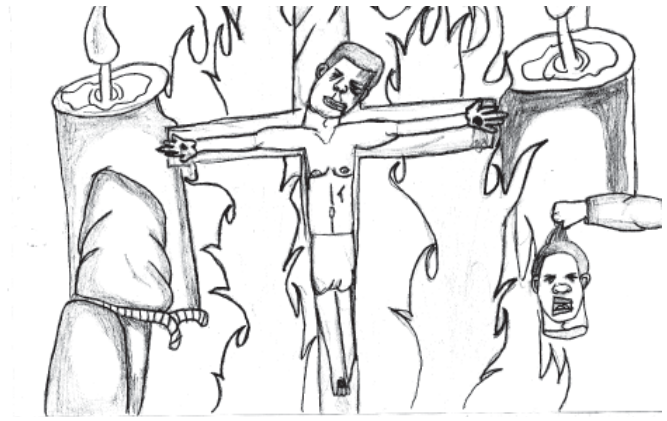
First off, I'll take the camera and tape that first deep breath relieving my pain from being locked up. Then on the way home with my mom with some grub talking about what has happened on the outs. Arriving home with all my family there that care for me and seeing my little nephew run up to give me a hug. Take the little kid to the store for candy. Having a family dinner with the fams. Maybe go to my school to sign up telling the camera what I've been missing, all the classes, food and girls.

I'd visit my grampa and help him with anything he needed at the time because he has cancer in the kidney and is weak right now. If there was any time left, I would invite some of my main homeboys, the ones that wrote me, and reminisce about old times and about my camera operation, and basically how I would spend my freedom if I was released.

If the judge was to see it with all the happiness in me and the people around me and some of the accomplishments I've achieved, he'll feel some empathy about my life and my freedom. I wish this would really happen.

-Ap, San Mateo

From The Beat: We, too, wish this could really happen, AP, because we think some powerful visual statements would be made. Of all the things you would show, we bet the judge would be most impressed by your visit with your grandpa, because that not only shows what freedom (and its loss) means to you, it also shows that you understand freedom comes with responsibility, and that you're ready to accept yours. Great piece!



What I Do Wrong?

(Dedicated To Butterfly)
You take away my freedom
And squash my dreams
Put me in a world that wasn't
Made for me
Tears run down the inside
Of my heart
And the pain has changed my face
But the tragic news
You can't erase
The nature of my womanhood
Is unseen
Was I in the plan of Adam and Eve?
Rotten seeds on a living tree
Blooming with no fruit
I cry out, oh Lord
That you'll take it away
But I remember
It's your plan
You made me this way.

-Imay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Imay, This is a great poem/letter to God. It's kinda interesting. Is all this part of Gods plan? Or is it based on our free will? Maybe our free will allows us to make the choice of what to do with all of our pain. Do we let it empower us? Or do we let it bring us down? You are a strong young woman. How do you explain your life experiences? What do you think?

Geekin' It

Concentration lacking
Emotions to memories stacking
Trying to shove them away
Fighting to stay focused 8 am — 3 pm a day
'Cause right now my top 10 list is my studies
Stoppped bustin' them funnies
Forget them other honeys
Each minute I'm building to my knowledge
I'm one day closer to college
Always reading in my room, never loud
Just trying to make momma proud
Failing in all classes back in… the past
Feels good getting As in Ms. Ploes's class
I was always known as the class clown
Now teach telling me my work is profound
Pencil in hand and book in my lap
Walking down the stage with a gown and cap
Call me what you want, call me a geek
But I'ma still succeed and keep getting that
"stude of the week."

-J-Cubs, San Mateo

From The Beat: We have a lot of words we'd like to call you: smart, intelligent, forward-thinking, leader, dedicated, college-bound — and so, so many more (but "geek" is not among them). Even though you're doing all this for yourself and your future, we hope it inspires others as much as it inspires us. We think if you're trying to make your momma proud, then you've succeeded. We know she must be as proud of you as we are. Thank you for this, J-Cubs.

Eternal Love

Baby girl
Your beautiful brown eyes
Surrounded by eye brows so elegant
You must have me in a trance
Because I believe I see innocence
Us meeting must have been heaven-sent
God sent me an angel
And I've loved her ever since
And I will continue to love her
Always and forever
No female can measure
The way she makes me smile
When we are together
But I think I let her slip away
And the thought fills me with pain
Today and for the remainder of my days
Through sunshine and through rain
Because I believe she's found another man
Who can love her better than I can
But if she ever wants to come back I'm her man
Because I will love her for eternity

-Lil' Gato, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your love seems strong enough, as strong as love can be. There must be something you're leaving out of your poem though. Do you put your love for banging above your love for her? Is that why you can't show her the love she deserves? If so, you better go deeper into your soul, 'cause banging gets old as a gravestone or a penitentiary walk around the yard alone. We know you're strong — strong enough to stop doing wrong?

Pencil in hand and book in my lap Walking down the stage with a gown and cap

I am tired of selling drugs in those messed up streets that don't give a shhh about you

Freedom

Dear Beat Within Readers,

What's up with it! Today, I just want to talk about when I get released from this hellhole.

Being in here has me really thinking about what I want to do to have my freedom, and keep it. I don't want to be in the streets no more.

I love all my homies, but they're not worth me being in here all the time. I need to distance myself from all the negative people that I be hanging with 'cause I need time now to think about what I need to do for myself.

I will be eighteen next year, and when I turn eighteen, it ain't no more Juvenile Hall, it is somewhere much worse. And like I said, I love my freedom and I would like to do something with my life.

I am tired of selling drugs in those messed up streets that don't give a shhh about you.

This Angie y'all, a lot of y'all need to read this and try to do the same.

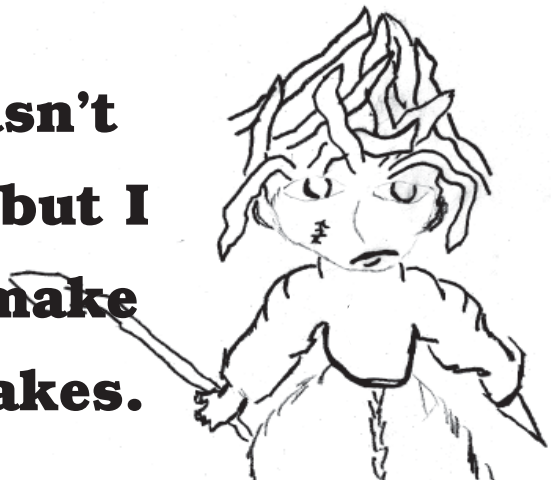
Peace. I'm out. One love to all. Keep your heads up. Martin, I love you baby. I'll be home soon. Remember that you are my life and just wait for me. Love, your baby. Keep praying. "God" will answer our prayer.

-Angelica, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's so nice for us to read a positive piece like this. Nobody wants to be in the Hall. But folks keep coming back! You seem to really know what you've got to do to get your life on the right track. You may be locked up in a room in Alameda County, but your mind is already free!

Standouts

I wasn't bad, but I did make mistakes.



A Place Like This

I've changed a lot since last year. I hate to say it took a place like this to help me. I appreciate life more than I have ever now. I would wake up and things were there, things I wish I wouldn't have taken for granted.

One thing I miss, besides basketball, is school. I'm not gone lie—they don't teach you shhh in Juvenile. The school system in here is really sad. I think change is good, if it's for the better. I just look at life in a positive way now. I wasn't bad, but I did make mistakes. I plan on learning from my mistakes, so I won't come back to places like this. I think it was time for change.

-Diddy B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What we admire about you, Diddy, is that you have taken advantage of what's offered. It's time for a change for many people, but only a few recognize the need and act on it. We're proud of you for knowing what's important, and for going after it. (Sorry about the quality of education in the hall. What are you doing to make up for that loss?)

Have I Changed

A year ago I would have been told I had no heart. Maybe it was true. I was using ice to freeze while nights became days. Everything I witnessed — friends and me hitting rock bottom — all that changed me.

Every day had a moral value when you doped out aka dope opera. I was only about myself not breaking anyone off, making girls cry, just watching with no sympathy. I was apathetic to everyone else.

Then I started to see it and that's when things changed. That was a year ago and I still remember it like it was a bad dream, waking up with heat sweats in the middle of the afternoon.

Since I've been locked up I've realized how I could have been that person acting a fool. The speed ball made me do it. I've hurt a lot of people and I'm sorry, but I know that it won't happen again because I have changed. All I need to work on is talking too much. Now and I'm all good and ready to go back on the outs.

-Ap, San Mateo

From The Beat: How did you "start to see" and begin to make the changes you write about? That first step is the most important because it is the beginning of every journey. If we had any caution for you, AP, it would be to stay on that path of change, even if things don't turn out to be "all good," and you find yourself slipping. We're not saying that's going to happen, but we are saying that we all fall, from time to time, even when we know what's right and what's wrong. If that should happen to you, don't let it be your excuse for going back to the bad old days. Just get up and keep on walking!

A Lot Of Changes

I have changed a lot over the last year. I feel I've gotten a lot more mature. I feel I've been on some grown man shhh, doin' thangs a lot of people are scared to do or do out of fear. I feel I've grown a lot street-wise. Most ninjas are scared to change. Sometimes I'm scared to change 'cause the block is all I know.

But now I have no choice but to change, 'cause they gone send me somewhere far away from the block. I'm going even to have to cut my hair.

So sometimes change is good and sometimes change is bad. One love to all my ninjas locked down behind the wall, and always consider change.

-O-Nasty B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It sounds to us that you are growing from boy to man, and that you're ready for the changes that come with that process of maturing. One sign that you are maturing is your admission that change scares you a little. It scares all of us a little, but acknowledging the fear is the way to conquer it. Do you know where they are sending you? Wherever, O-Nasty, we hope you take advantage of whatever positive they offer, and do your best to resist whatever negative is available (because it's always available).

Too Much

I'm sitting here in the Juvie rec area with too much on my mind. Will I mess up in the unit I'm being sent to or will I fire on some ninja. The administration is shiesty for putting everybody in that unit. I feel they are setting me up for failure.

In the deepest part of my mind, I feel I can pimp my program, but at the same time my thuggish mentality might take over. I can see myself trying to be cool, but some ninja trying to make me take off. So off top I got to flash and whoop the ninja, and show I don't have a string you can pull.

As I think about the obstacles that I face in the near future, I wonder how soon I will see my family. I can't believe I'm so out of touch. Damn, this judicial system is too much!

-Castor, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We think you are smart enough to handle yourself where ever you are sent. You just have to make sure you don't let people's words get under your skin. Keep your cool and you'll do fine. If you take off on someone — that just proves that you let someone get to you. Never give them that satisfaction.

Success Is The World

Success is the world.
Success is happiness.
Success is making your mom happy.
Success is joy.
Success is making it out of the 'hood.
Success is to be a man.
Success is making it out of the Hall.
Success is to be with God.
Success is having a job.
Success is doing the right things.
Success is good.
Success is whatever you want it to be.
Success is to be an old man.

-Wg, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You have a wonderful view on what success is. Right now, do you feel like a success? Why or why not? In the future, do you hope to be a successful person? Do you think every person is successful in his or her own way?

I WANT TO CRY

I don't know why

The Girl
There's this girl
I don't know her name
Only Kristin or something,
But I want to play her game

This place restricts co-eds
I don't know why
I just want a pen-pal
This rule makes me sigh

To her, I have to say
I'm gonna find out your name
Anyway

Next Beat that you write
Tell it to me
So I can write to you
When I become free.

-Smokey, San Mateo

From The Beat: We are so pleased to read a piece from you that has hope in it. We were beginning to believe you'd talk about death in every one of your writings. Who would've thought all it would take was a woman to get Smokey to think about something positive. (Well, at least we hope you're having positive thoughts.) We want to remind you that it's co-ed all the time out here, so when you get out have fun. But stay out... and stay safe.

RIP

(2x)
I say RIP to all my ninjas who died
They say thugs don't cry
But there's tears in my eyes
I'm feelin' yo' pain
And yo' momma feel it, too
Sometimes I wish they would've killed me
Instead of killin' you

(2x)
I say, "Rest in peace"
It's hard to believe
'Cause I left you hangin'
On the night you got sprayed
So I'm seekin' revenge
'Til I'm dead in my grave

This piece right here, or should I say choruses, is dedicated to all the fallen soldiers who I know. I just wanted to let y'all know, that y'all gone, but not forgotten. It's hard times right now, tryna to make it, but somehow we still find moments to shed tears for you. May heaven bless y'all with a better life.

-M-Burna B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What a beautifully written, but sad flow, M-Burma. It reminds us both of the tragedy of life on the streets and just how much we miss your style and substance! As to the revenge you seek, all we can do is remind you that as long as that is the pattern, the killing will continue down through your children's generation and your grandchildren's — and that is the true tragedy. While the rich get richer, the poor continue to kill each other over turf which they don't own, and for city blocks whose taxes pay the cops that wrap you and your homies up, and the cages that they put you in. Tragedy upon tragedy!

I want to respect everybody, and that makes me know that I've changed.

I Miss My Family

Why did I have to get in that car? Now I miss my family. I should've listened to my mom when she told me to do stuff for her. I wanna get out of here. I wanna go home with my mom and brothers. I wish I could be home right now.

When I get out I'm going to listen to everything my mom tells me. I won't talk back to her or anything no more.

I wanna get out of Oakland too. Oakland ain't no joke these days. People getting killed, people coming to jail and stuff. I promise I won't come back to jail. I'm gonna go to school and find a job and stay out of the streets. I miss my family. I wish I could be with them right now. This is for my family. I love y'all. Love.

-Lil' Dm, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Heartfelt writing. We hope you can keep the promise of staying off the streets and staying out of jail. Can you find a way to compromise with your mother? When you get out, how can you make up for lost time with your mother?

I wanna get out of Oakland too. Oakland ain't no joke these days.

I Think I've Changed

The reason I think I've changed is because I want to get a job and go back to school — and take care of my baby and show him the right way and keep him on the right track!

Another reason I think I've changed, is because I don't want to go back to my 'hood and do the same thing. And I want to help my potnas and try to keep them from gettin' locked up or endin' up dead somewhere!

I want to respect everybody, and that makes me know that I've changed. There were a couple of days when I was always disrespecting everybody; and I don't like how I feel. So now it's like — if I don't have nothing good to say, I won't say nothing at all.

And I want to show my family, that I'm a changed man and that I'm tired of being locked up.

-Shady Boy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: They say that when you're sick and tired of feeling sick and tired, you're ready to change! You've got that going for you, and so much more. You want to do right by your son, which means living right to show him what's right. And the compassion you feel toward your potnas, racing down the road to incarceration and/or death. We think you've changed. And as you struggle and strive to keep it up, look for progress not perfection. 'Cause you're heading in the right direction — and you're an inspiration to us all!

Success Is Something Good

Success is something good.
Success is making money the right way
Success is money
Success is getting out of the Hall
Success is staying out
Success is having a caring mother and father
Success is having a good job
Success is having your own house
Success is having a good heart
Success is graduating from high school
Success is boxing
Success is not coming back to Juvenile Hall
Success is not getting released to Camp.

-P-Daddy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thanks for sharing your thoughts with us. Do you consider yourself a success? If yes, why? If no, do you want to be successful one day? How can you make the road to your future a bright one?

This System Can't Change Me

Have I changed? No, I have not changed. This system can't change me. I can only change myself. If I was thinking about changing, I wouldn't be in jail.

By taking away my freedom and taking me away from my family, they think it'll make me change, but it just makes me madder! I was mad when I got caught, and by keeping me here I stay mad. I was mad at the people who snitched on me, not at the police.

I gotta get out one day. I'll change when I get out. I'll be smarter about whom I'm with. I'd rather get caught by myself than by a snitch, ya feel?

I'm proud of everything I do, and I'm proud of who I am. I'm proud of my family. Everything! I'm proud of how they take care of me, how they give me what I need and not just whatever I want. When I need shoes, they get 'em, but not 'cause there are new Jordans out. I'm proud of my auntie, 'cause I can stay with her whenever I need.

My pride in my family makes me want to change! By change, I mean — on the outs! I ain't gonna let the system think it can change me. If I get out and change, my family will get the credit for it! I want them to get credit, not these counselors in here.

-Lil' Shawn, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We feel your pride in your family, for how they provide for your needs when you're on the outs. And you're beginning to reach that age where you can get a job and help provide not only for yourself but for them, too. And that's a major reason to change. It's not just the money though, 'cause that fast money gets you locked up fast, too! About the system, forget what they think. If you don't give them the power to change you, then don't give them the power to stop you from changing! It's in your power! So start the change in here, for you family's sake, and you're more likely to carry on successfully when you're out!

My pride in my family makes me want to change!

No Peace

From the beginnin' when I was thought in the mind
of Jesus was the day I was evolved in da fetus.
What is gone cannot be found
Till all lies within da ground
Pieces of my life are the brightest man's mystery
While he finds the answer I'm losing life's fight
'cause lack of energy
It seems my enemies can provoke
Like dumb thoughts off dope
How can I feel peace declining
down a symbolic slope?
If success
Was dressed
In a dress
I'd undress it
Because I'll always miss what's worth more
My stupidity is relentless
How can I commend
What the judge condemns
And people can't feel peace
with their best friend in the pen
Your mind's the worst place
to be especially by yo' self
It's the worst neighborhood even with help
Institution gonna stop us
The block gonna pop us
Find peace in our minds; nobody can stop us.

-Black Majik, 150 Crew

From The Beat: deep piece. Do you think you can free your mind? What does it mean to be mentally free? Is anyone really able to find a peace of mind with all of our surroundings? Why do you think some people feel alone inside their minds? Is it because our thoughts are sometimes so sporadic?

She'll cook a fat meal, and I'll save a plate for the judge.

My Hours of Freedom: On Camera

If I had the chance to have my freedom back, by using a camera for six hours — I would show the judge that I'd be with my mom all day!

I would pick up my lil' brother and take him to the 'hood to show him you can't be hangin' out on the street. I would show him where I used to stay at. Then I would take him and his friends to the park and play football with them for two hours. Then I would drop him off.

Then I would go to my grandma's house, chill with all my family members — and show the judge how my grandma get down! She'll cook a fat meal, and I'll save a plate for the judge.

Then I would go to the house and get my girl. I'd take her out and show her a good time. After that I'd take her home, give her a kiss and a hug, and tell her that I will be back.

Then I would go to my brother's house. I'd kick it with him and da crew and moms. That's all my hours. So I'd take the camera back to the judge.

-Hk, 150 Crew

From The Beat: With or without a camera, it sounds like a beautiful day. The judge will see what a loving family you have: your mom, grandma, brothers, and even your girlfriend, all giving you love. And that talk to your little brother and his friends, that is something special. But what about school? And will you look for part-time work to put money in your pocket? Or are those things that will get covered in your talk with your little brother? We know the judge would be moved, seeing your family with you!

The Camera Counts

Basically, I would show the judge that I can be responsible and I can survive in this world. For the first hour, I would have someone hold the camera and follow me as I walk around town — trying to find a job; and being respectful to people in the community.

My second hour would be me, going around in the community, doing community service. And I want to show him that I can walk around outside without robbing a house or getting into a fight or smoking weed.

And the rest of the hours, I would live my life and show him how I live day by day, without getting in trouble! Gotta struggle every day with a dysfunctional family — but I can still make it happen! And that's all.

-Rico, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That looks like pretty good stuff you got there. Imagine if you actually found a job in that hour! Finding a job usually takes more than just walking into a store or whatever and asking for one; and a lot longer than an hour, or a day, or even a week. But if you put in job app's and handle yourself well, that shows something. What about registering for high school?

What The System Do To Us

Sometimes I think like, "What's better having twelve people convict you or six people carrying you?" But now, dying and going to jail is two different things. In jail everything is stripped from you — your freedom, your self respect, and your loved ones are all taken away. Yeah, you can still see them and touch them, but at the same time, we get conditioned. We get bitter. Then we get disrespected by some control staff thinking they some toy cop who probably doesn't have any authority at home so they come to work and abuse what lil' authority they have. I mean do jail corrupt our people to be more scrupulous?

The way see it is one day you're living a regular everyday life, the next you're in jail being treated like an animal. Then they wonder why when we get released we like an animal.

-Lil' Dakota B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Even if the staff take advantage of what authority they have, you are giving that authority to them — precisely because you're not living "a regular everyday life." Sometimes you get wrapped up for no reason at all (other than where you live, how old you are, and what color your skin is), but most of the time when you lose your freedom it's because you're doing things that give them the power to control you and tell you what to do.

Changing In My Mind

Well, this life I live changes every day, 'cause I'm getting older by the day — but I still got the same mentality I came in with.

I guess I've changed a lot since I first came in here. I've changed by thinking about my life, because when I was out, I didn't think about my life much. Now my life is the most important thing to me, because that's all I've got, and some family.

I thought I would never change, because I was just a little knucklehead back then. But now I see things differently, 'cause I'm getting older — and I don't want to be the same badass little kid anymore. I want to be the man that I'm becoming, you know.

I came into the Hall with the mind of a kid. Now I'm growing into a man's body but still have a kid's mind. But hopefully, when I get out, I get the mind that I lost before I came here. I guess I'm changing, slowly but surely.

-Augie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We can hear the maturity in you growing even as we read this piece. It takes maturity to write this. In the recovery movement, they say you stop maturing at the age that you start taking drugs. Then, when you stop, you start maturing again from that point. We don't think it's that simple, but you've done some growing up since you've been here; and you have some more to do. But props on seeing through — to what's real!

My Juvenile Experiment

I lived my life OK, but my decisions were poor. Since I came in here this last time, it's really changing my life.

I'm not scared or just saying it to get out. I lived a life kids would be scared to live, but I was never the person to go jail. Every time I went, I went for something petty and got out. But this time I really just sat back and listened. Now, I'm tripping off the time, but I'm not tripping because of Jack. He keeps my mind strong.

I have been listening to the Omega, and now I'm getting it. On the street I went to a lot of things like Omega, Street Talk, being on the news and all, but I always had to go back to the streets. But now, I'm laying and hearing. I just can't just go out and leave and forget about it. I know I'm going to be a better person when I get out, because I'm leaving.

-Tyrelle B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: If what you hear in Omega is finally getting through, we congratulate you (and Jack). Why do you think it took this time to reach you when you heard it before and it didn't reach you? Whatever, the fact that you are really hearing it this time is the thing that gives us the hope that we won't be seeing you here again. Where are you going? Are you leaving the city or your block? Were do you see yourself in a year? Five years?

"Lights, Camera, Action"

The first thing I'll do is go home and take a hot bath, then a nap. I will film myself in a deep, peaceful sleep. Then I'll have a peaceful dinner with my family and we'll sit down in the living room and conversate. About two hours have passed, four hour left.

I'll take my brothers out for like two hours to the park, store, shopping, etc.. For the last two hours I'll make love to my girl, and when I come back to YGC I'll have someone handcuff me and walk in the building with my head down, with the camera still rolling.

I'll tell the judge that by keeping me institutionalized I can't be a big brother, can't be a boyfriend, and can't be a son to my father. I'm being taken out of my natural habitat and placed in captivity. Also for him to keep the video, because that'll be the last time I'll live in peace because the environment I'm placed in will ruin any opportunity I might have had of changing.

-Afro B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is MUCH better than your conversation of jumping on that jet plane... Of course, we wonder if the judge will just play that part where you're making love to your girl, and never see the other powerful images of freedom you've assembled. How would you show the judge that you now understand that freedom comes with certain responsibilities, as well as doing those things that are so meaningful to you?

Gotta struggle every day with a dysfunctional family — but I can still make it

My Videotape Of Freedom

If I had six hours to videotape what freedom is to me — six precious hours — I would videotape what's real.

First, I would videotape my room, my sanctuary. My mom is the gateway to my personality. Nothing in my room is out of context with me.

Second, I would go into my kitchen and go into the fridge and just start cookin' somethin'. I like to cook. Ever since I was little I was on my own a lot, so I had to take care of my self. Also being that I have no male influence in my life, cooking became a new way for me to express myself.

Next I would show me and sister. She's 11 years old she's a big part of my life. I love her a lot. She's a big part of my freedom. Words can't explain. So you'll just have to watch the video.

Next Im'a have to hit the block with my boys. Show how much fun we have just chillin'. We ain't doin no wrong even if everyone think we do.

Finally I would go back to my house and show all my original music (writtin by me), my lyric book, my art book even the mural I made in my back yard. That's freedom to me. Drawing, singing, rapping, writing music, reading, chillin' with my sister, and my friends. That's life. That's how I'm livin'.

-Nightmare B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Sounds like a very interesting video, and we give you props for taking the topic seriously. Give us a copy too so we can watch it. If that tape was to ever be made, we think the judge would definitely see what freedom means to you.

Nights, While The Sun Is Out

It's not easy waking up in juvenile hall everyday and doing what I did the day before. I mean it is physically easy, but mentally it is a different chapter.

It is simple to wake up, shower, breakfast, rec, Gym, lunch, rec, gym, dinner and rec. It's easy doing that stuff, but everyday? The only thing I did daily outside is smoke weed along with my freedom. I used to like to do different things when I was free. I liked going to the movies, playing football, listening to my own choice of music, and different women.

I have my girlfriend, but I still spoke to other women. I won't lie, I felt guilty at the time. But let me tell you, it felt good physically what I was doing to those women. But my heart was not feeling the same.

Well, what I want to say is, "I took advantage of the world outside." But a lot was not good. Now it caught up with me and will have me down for a while."

What can I do? It is not all right but what can I do now?

-No Name B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Nice, truthful piece. It's funny how us humans don't know how to cherish what we have until we lose it. But now you know, so let's hope this is the last time we will see you in the halls. What you've written is a fine piece about short-term vs long-term. In the short-term, you were having a good time, but by ignoring the long-term, you put a lot of obstacles in your path. But the one thing we can all do is learn from our past — and use it to guide us to a better future.

Right now my life is hectic, but I don't want my life like that no more.

Freedom

Walking down the street
Seeing beautiful ladies
Seeing the market
Seeing people walking
I'm in Arizona
Phoenix
Being with my family
Being with all my loved ones
Like Danielle
— my girl
Smoking a cigarette
Dressing up wit' Dada jeans
Polo tank tops
Tommy boxers
White Air Force Ones with the Gucci patch
Freedom
I like soul food
Corn bread
Ribs
Neck bones
Candy yams
Collard greens
Deep-fried catfish
At my momma's restaurant
Dolly's soul food place
In Atlanta G-A
Sometimes it don't work out that way
I'm in jail
This is freedom
Now

-Danny Boy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your imagination seizes its freedom, and you share it with our readers. Take us flying through the skies of your mind to touch down in Phoenix, AZ and Atlanta, GA — full of visions of sunny streets, fashionable clothes and tasty food full of soul! They locked up your body, but your mental camera rolls!

I'm in jail
This is freedom
Now

Life

Life. I don't know about you, but I care about my life. It didn't seem like I cared about my life because the shhh I do. I figure I have to stop giving a damn about what ninjas says, and just live my life the way I want to live.

Right now my life is hectic, but I don't want my life like that no more. I wanna get off probation. I wanna go home. I got one more chance to let the judge know that I love my life. If I don't, they gonna lock me up and throw away the key.

RIP Ren, Money-B.

-Young Homie B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: How are you going to impress the judge that you value your life and respect the lives of others, Young Homie? Why do think you keep doing it the stuff that gets you here when you know the consequences? What do you enjoy doing that's legal that you might build your life around? School? Sports? Computers?

My Life (Part Two)

My family and I had problems because I was never home. I was en el barrio con mis homies (in the neighborhood with my homies). Every time I went home, all my mom did was scream at me, and when she did, I always left because I was tired of hearing the same shhh. So all I knew was the street life. I never went to school, and if I did, I would leave to go to the block. I didn't care about making friends at my school.

Being on the block got me locked up for a fight and they charged me with assault with a deadly weapon and gang affiliation and some other stuff. In total I had twelve counts. I got locked up with two of my homeboys. We took it to trial and we lost. When you go to jail, they give you a confinement time, but sometimes you don't do it. So after I lost the trial, my confinement time was eleven years in YA. Thank God I never did that time. I was in jail for a minute and then I went home on a ankle monitor since it was my first time going to jail.

After that I kept coming in and out of here until March 23, 2004. Then I ended up going to a group home called Euclid for ten months and then I graduated. I went home on a 45-day trial and I messed up and I came back in here so my P0 was trying to find another group home for me Euclid told him they would take me back so I went back. When I got there it was all good, but after a month-and-a-half, a girl started to hate on me, snitching on me to the staff. So I got into a fight and I bounced.

I was on the run for a minute. Then I came here for a warrant. So now I'm going to Colorado until June 2005. I ain't mad because I know I gotta get my shhh together, 'cause it's time for me to change some parts of my life 'cause I'll be 18 in three months and this is my last chance. I'm out.

-Alicia GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Thanks for giving us the details of your life. What kind of stuff was your mom always bothering you about? Do you think you two could compromise so being at home will feel more welcoming? What things do you think you need to change so you'll be able to make Colorado your last encounter with the system? How will you deal with your anger so you won't feel you need to run or smash on someone?

Success = Happiness

Success is not about getting' money, fame, or power. Success is about being happy. I think that if you are happy, that is being successful. There is no point in having fame, power, or money if you aren't happy.

-Wise One B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Nothing we can add to this except to ask what makes you happy. Why do you think so many folks get distracted by fame, money and power?

Game Over

Time is messed up right now for me, because people shooting up my block, shooting good people that's in the way at a bad time.

It's messed up when people can't even go outside of their houses. Someone comes up and shoots your house up, or some people can just be in your doorway and just get shot up. And the cold part about it is that there can be babies on the floor having fun, then boom. Like Lil' Flip say, "Game Over." So keep the kids out the way.

-Lil' Clap B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It's a damn shame that anyone has to worry about their kids getting shot, Lil' Clap. How did deal with it when you were growing up? What do you think would make your neighborhood safer? How can you keep yourself safe and sane? What do you thin living with the constant fear of getting wounded or killed does to people? How has it affected you?

Graduate From LCR

It's been eleven months since I been down
This Friday I'm going to set foot back in town.
Time to make a change, time to make a stand
That's why all these times I created myself a plan.
About to step foot back on the street
Kind of scared, kind of happy
But no matter what, I'll stand on both my feet.
There's no excuse if I ever get locked up again
Not after all the experience and knowledge that I've gained.

-Noel B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Nice flow and excellent attitude. We hope you will put all of this knowledge and experience to work for you this time around and that we'll never see you in the Hall again. And just in case you mess up a little, be gentle with yourself and start on the right path again.

So Lonely

I am so lonely in my cage
And having nothing left to do except reminisce
About the old me and you
You were never someone worth my time
But yet I still opened up
I gave you everything my heart, body, and soul
Yet you never cared
You dealt dope and hurt people
Took me to the streets
and showed me how you survived
But then I get pregnant
And don't know what to do
I raised this baby all by myself
No help from nobody, not even you
I'm stuck in my jail cell
Feeling so irresponsible for being here
Mad at the fact that you don't give a damn
But then I think that there's
nobody to blame but myself
Can't explain how lonely I get sometimes
When I think about me and you
But then I remember the pain you put me through
And I thank myself sometimes
For being as strong as I am.

-Molly, San Mateo

From The Beat: You should thank yourself often for your strength — it's apparent from this piece that your strength has been what's held you together through times that would pull a lesser person down. How can you continue to be strong, to pick up the pieces of what has been shattered, and be there for your child? How can the lessons you've learned from this experience continue to make you stronger? Can this feeling of loneliness, along with your baby, provide you with the motivation you need to get back — and stay back — on the outs?

**I raised this baby all by myself
No help from nobody,
not even you**

Can I Get An Understanding? Part II

(Dedicated To All Females)
I need to know what you're thinking 'bout
Baby girl, ain't no need to pout
Can I get an understanding?
You know I'm wanting you,
But you keep on frontin' boo
Can I get an understanding?
I want to you to be real
Speak ya' mind, so I can know the deal
Can I get an understanding?
For you, I quit the game,
But your silence is makin' me insane
Can I get an understanding?
Bonnie and Clyde
Is how we'll ride
Can I get an understanding?
I don't know if you don't tell
Your silence makes me feel like hell
Can I get an understanding?
I'm willing to make you my queen
If I can just get an understanding.

-Prince Charming, San Mateo

From The Beat: With words like these, we know why your name is Prince Charming. How will you play your part in the understanding? If she comes with a similar set of questions, would you be willing to answer? Do you think you'd reach an understanding?

I Have Changed For The Better

I have changed by not selling drugs this past year. I have gone back to school to further my education. My grade point average (GPA) has risen to a 3.5!

I also have been going to after school programs to improve my grades. My best accomplishment is the fact that I have stayed out of Juvenile Hall for three years.

I feel I am different, because I have matured. I have woken up to realize that life is not a game, not with all the death and crimes happening around me. I view things from a different perspective than I did when I was younger.

-Young Iceberg, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We couldn't be more proud of you! To quit selling drugs is a major accomplishment, whether anyone else says so or not — it is! And congratulations on putting that effort into your schoolwork. Props on that GPA! Okay?

My anger issues used to interfere with everything around me!

A Big Change

I think that I made a big change in my life because I really didn't give a damn about anything, or anyone but me, my family, and my folks. So I used to be out stealing alcohol, bikes, people's cars, and money. I was just hella grimy and ruthless. I had to keep it street, but now it's like shhh.

Was all that stuff I was doing really worth it? What did I get out of it? Yeah, I got money and other worthless shhh, but the only real thing I got out of it was: jail, probation, and more problems. Now, it's like when people want to do something like stealing, they come to me and be like, "I know you down," and I be like, "Yeah, I'm down, but I ain't 'bouts to go out like that. If I do, it's gonna be worth it."

All I'm really trying to say is, don't let people pump yo' head up wit' foolishness because you can do good and still be real, especially if you lived it and no one can tell you're fake, especially if they don't know you. Just think about it. Holla.

-Young Sip, San Mateo

From The Beat: You made a good change and we commend you for that. There is one thing we're wondering though. You say you're down, but it has to be worth it. What is worth your freedom? What is worth your life? Can somebody put a price on your freedom? Would you go to jail for ten years if somebody paid you two million dollars? Why or why not?

You Make Your Success

Success is what you make out of it. It's not what you do, it's how you do. Do what you do! But you know what's right and you know what's wrong.

Life is a lot about choices — if you do something wrong, that's on you! Ain't nobody controlling you but yourself. You have to take pride in yourself and be a man — because you can't always rely on other people. You have to depend on yourself, too.

Stay up and handle yo' business. Pimp that probation and move on with yo' life. Feeeel meee! Pimp juice!

-Vongphachanh, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Don't you think it's both what you do and how you do it. We think that's what you're saying about knowing right from wrong. Do right but also do well; do what you do and do it well! Stay free, successfully! Peace.

Mia's Back But Changed

What's up with it, Beat? This is Mia coming back one time. I woke up about six thirty this morning, and I was very sleepy.

I was having a dream that some girls gave me a Newport, and I was just about to light it up — when the staff came to my door and said, "Time to get up!" So I did not get a chance to smoke my Newport, just like I did not get my chance to go home!

In the past year though, I really have changed. I don't fight for stupid reasons no more. I have also changed by overlooking things and handling myself in a different way. My anger issues used to interfere with everything around me!

At this present time I am trying to change for the better, because I am tired of spending more time in here!

-Mia, 150 Crew

From The Beat: They say every cigarette you smoke is another nail in your coffin, but hey — not when you just dream about it! With the changes you're making, you will get your chance to go home, and if you keep improving yourself, you might never have to come back here again. Props on your changing.

Changed!

I used to believe that change was bad. But now I say it depends on what type of change occurs.

Me, I know me — and I've changed because I don't get mad and angry hecka much no more. I've calmed down and learned to tame my anger. And I used to stay hecka mad at everybody, but now I've realized that it's not their fault that they're mentally impaired.

I just wanna say to the ninjas that's reading this — if change is needed for you to be free, or if it is needed for you to be comfortable in life … then you better change! Either your friends need to be changed, or your environment needs to be changed, or you need to change the way you want to live your life.

I've changed my life style, too. I mean, I still kick it, but I got my GED and I go to college! And I'm getting a job. So, I'm legit for now, while I'm still at Camp. I think while the system (Camp) is making money off me, I might as well take advantage of the different programs that will benefit me later on in life.

Shout-out to my patna Boobie up in the Hall. Peace out, your boy Big H.

-Howard, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You know we worry about that square/thug approach, e.g., "I'm legit for now, while I'm still at Camp." In our experience, the thug that wants to fly high always ends up taking the square down with him — when you fall.

Changed For The Better

I have changed for the better, some might think these kind of things can make or break a person. Well, this has made me a better person — I have learned so much from this experience.

It took time for me to settle down and really think about the brighter side of things, but eventually I did. Seeing the good in a bad situation, can make you sooo much stronger.

I know all of you reading this are probably worrying about your court cases, or what you have been given. Just hold on, times will get better.

You have to look at life through a different light. Be thankful for everything you have: parents, all your family, your health, and life itself! Because if you lose sight, take a look around, and start getting comfortable.

-D Frank, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The mental and spiritual power you display in turning a hard lesson into a blessing, is inspiring to anyone stuck in here stressing. Yet few understand how becoming a better person actually makes you feel better, too. Props to you.

Positive Change: Healthy Fun

I have changed in a positive way, because now I don't smoke weed. I don't drink. I just have healthy fun.

Right now I am hella happy, because my girlfriend is coming back from Mexico on Friday! So I am going to get to her soon.

I am also kind of worried though, because I answered the phone here at Camp — and I am supposed to get a write-up for it. I just hope that he forgets about it and lets me slide, so I can get my full home pass. Because I really want to spend the whole weekend with her!

-Krusher, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We hope you get that full weekend pass. You handled yourself well under stress; we remember how much you wanted to go on that family vacation back to Mexico, too. Whatever happens this weekend, be coo' and it will be all good.

A Different Me

A year ago until now, I have seen a difference in myself. My attitude is a little different; for example, I've been learning how to change my behavior in Juvenile Hall, since this is my second time.

But even more important, I've learned how to stay out of Juvenile Hall. I'm going to school now, while last year I did not go one single day. And I'm doing very well in school. I've learned a lot of life skills there. I learned about AIDS and HIV. And I learned math, too.

The last time I was here, I had never been to Juvenile Hall before in my life, so it was different for me that first time. But now, it's my second time — and I know how to handle myself better. I'm on level three already, and that makes it more fun for me.

-Baby Doll, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Don't get too used to coming to Juvenile Hall, but we are glad that you've learned how to do better and feel better while you're here. And what you say you've been doing on the outs is all good — no, it's great! Props.

I don't smoke weed. I don't drink. I just have healthy fun.

Crazy Changes

I have changed in a lot of ways. I have gotten older, and wiser, too. I have gotten more mature with time. I have calmed down in a lot of ways — and gotten rowdy in some ways about certain things.

I have learned to let some things go, that I would have gotten into a fight over in the past. I have learned to be low-key about some of the shhh I do. But I'm still hella hot about most the shhh I do.

I have got most of my morals in line. I have got most of my priorities straight, too. I have learned what's important and what's not important. I've learned to restrain most of my anger about certain things, and I try not to let people see my weaknesses — I don't want people to know how to get to me and press my buttons. Stay up, homies.

-Crazy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This piece not only testifies to your growing maturity and wisdom, it reflects both! And as such, has a lot to teach any reader who wants to change for the better. You've become a role model in the pages of The Beat. It's been a privilege to witness your growth week by week. Much respect.

Them Months

I need to.
I want to.
I have to.
I can't.
I'm talking about leaving.
I've been here for three months.
I've showered here for three months.
I've slept here for three months.
I've eaten here for three months.
I've hoped to get ill here for three months so I could leave.
I've wished I was home for three months.
I've wished I could shower at home for three months.
I've wished I could sleep at home for three months.
I've wished I could have eaten at home for the last three months.
I've wished I was healthy at home for the last three months.

-Brent, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We really like the way your poem builds as the lines lengthen. The emotion is strong, start to finish, but by the end it seems to stretch out like time itself.

Changed My Life

This Oakland boy has changed a lot
Some may see it, some may not
But I stop' hittin' licks and stop' sellin' rock
I changed my life in many ways
'cause I'm tired of postin' on the block
'cause most of the time ish gets too hot
I need to be cool and pimp this Camp ish
Even though it gets boring
I'm not going out like a trick
It's hella easy to run
If I wasn't changed I would have did it
But now that I learned I know
This shhh I got to finish
I'm gon' always be a beast
I'm gon' always be from the streets
You can take me out the street
But you can't take the street out of me

-H, 150 Crew

From The Beat: "Stop' hittin' licks and stop' sellin' rock" — you're talking changed a lot! Whether staff sees it or not! But if you stay dedicated to your turf, how you gonna maintain your good work, and stay free? Tell us more about what you mean.

I Think I've Had Enough

I have changed my life by not getting in trouble. The reason why I came in here, was for a warrant — because I ran from Camp Sweeney, two years ago!

Now I'm eighteen years of age, but I didn't get in trouble for two years. And, even though I ran, I really think Camp Sweeney had an effect on me!

So now that I'm eighteen years of age, I have to get a job and get my life straight. That means, going back to school, too! And that's how I'm going to change my life.

-Dark One, 150 Crew

From The Beat: How did you stay out of trouble? If you weren't going to school, what were you doing? What effect did Camp Sweeney have on you? You quit acting crazy, or bold, or what?

Hurt's So Bad

I've hurt my mom. I was so mad at her seven days before I got arrested. She thinks so badly about everybody. I told her that I would choose to live in a dumpster than live or be anywhere near her, and that I want my parents to get a divorce.

They embarrass me too much. I hate my mom as you should know. I'm not going to get over it. I wasn't hurt, my mom is. I will be perfectly fine the day I move the hell out of my parent's house. Or I will live with my dad!

I did cause her pain on purpose because I think she needs to look in the mirror before she says anything bad 'bout anybody else. I would do it all over if I could avoid it, but only when she goes back to her old ways.

I'm only hurt because I'm in JSC. I get depressed and stressed a lot. My advice is the following: When you get down or put down by others, do something like read a book, or go to sleep, or talk to the supervisor or someone higher than them.

-Pete, San Luis Obispo

From The Beat: You do a really good job putting your anger and disgust out on paper. About your family life, we don't know the whole situation, but we know it's not cool to be around trash-talkers and gossips. But people everywhere do it, so what's a good way to deal with it? Can you explain to her that it gets to you when she bad-mouths other folks? That it doesn't help her or the family to be always hatin'? Change the subject? Leave the room? What have you tried? Do you have any idea why your mom is like this? Does she have a low opinion of herself that she covers over by hating on others? Having compassion for your mom might help you forgive and even help you. Whatever you do, we really hope your living situation improves. Good advice by the way, we also think it's cool to talk a problem over with the person you have the problem with.

Big Pimpin' My Changes

My change is being in Juvenile Hall. For the little bit of time I've been in here, it has changed me mentally. I don't think I will get away with the little stuff anymore with just a spank on the hand.

My change is taking nothing for granted, because just thinking of my freedom now drives me crazy! Not being able to do the things that I love doing, which are: spending time with my 'loved family members; being able to go anywhere I want to; being able to take a shower or use the bathroom whenever I want; or spending time with my girlfriend; and everything else that I cannot do while I am locked up in this facility.

It has changed me in such a way as to have me not wanting to do no wrong. And do nothing but right. And help others who are heading in the same direction I was.

As you can see, the reason for my change is all of the above. And if I could, I would turn back the hands of time so that I would not be in the predicament I am.

-Big Pimpin', 150 Crew

From The Beat: You know, we at The Beat don't really like the term "pimping" because of its age-old exploitative, sexist and violent history. Yet we understand it's now often used simply to mean, in control, similar to the use of the word "boss". That said, the piece you've just written is pimping a bad situation, in the best sense of the term! Those who can turn a crisis into an opportunity, and a hard lesson into a blessing — are gifted, in every sense of this word. That you want to pass this gift, your big change, along to others; inspires us with great respect for you. Now we only hope that you really do follow through. Peace.

I Love It

I love it when,
I don't see the light early in the morning
Shining straight in your eyes!

I love it when,
I don't hear
Click, click, click
To go to school, wake up, just to go anywhere

I love it when,
I don't wear other people's
Clothes, underwear, shoes

I love it when,
I don't have to ask anyone to
Move, go to the bathroom, open my door, or just to breathe

I really, really love it when,
I turn around and see the doors close behind me
And I wear my own clothes

I love it when,
I get released!

-Karla, San Luis Obispo

From The Beat: Yeah! That's the best feeling. But it's also a big responsibility to make sure you make the best choices for your life, and also in the eyes of probation. How are you going to make sure that you choose well on the outs so you can stay with the things you love?

The Victim Always Sees Me

My victim sees me
Every day
Every night

He/she looks at me with
Hate
Disgust
And disappointment

My question to that:
Who is it?
What is it?
How does this thing see me?

Simple.
I'm sitting here looking straight in the eye,
The disgusting eye of
My victim

Location:
Looking in the mirror
Victim:
Me

-Karla, San Luis Obispo

From The Beat: What do you say to your victim? Do you make up excuses for putting your victim in the situation she is in? Do you make promises you're not sure you can keep? Does she trust you? How can you make it up to your victim?

Hall Life

I am feeling sick of this Hall life. Don't let this Hall ish fool you. All these days I spent in this Hall, God only knows what kind of money I've missed out on, and how many days of my life passed me by.

Thinking of the outs, thinking of the family — and still not knowing what to do! This Hall life got me steady trippin', feeling like I got no life no more.

But I know when I get out, there will be nothing that is going to stop me. It's no putting down my game. See, I see it like I am predicting my own future — seeing my life before it happens, now that I've been locked up!

I still say that I can never stop being who I am. For me, freedom is not enough — I need more than freedom! I need to have a good life!

-The Gypsy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We see your future, too, if you go straight back to what you used to do. That game is stopped, has stopped — and will stop again if you go back to playing it! You need to take your head-tripping seriously and rethink your future. If you want a good life, you need to stop doing wrong and start living right.

freedom is not enough — I need more than freedom! I need to have a good life!



I've been smoking for a while, and the only thing that was changing was the money in my pocket.

A Lot Changes, A Lot Stays The Same

I've changed in a lot of ways. For example, I've changed by graduating from high school. But some things don't change.

I've changed my attitude towards others. I think my attitude was out of control.

But now I've noticed that changing my attitude has also changed my mind — from thinking of just the present, to thinking ahead ten years from now. I've learned to see how the world is moving while I'm standing still.

But I've made a change — to see the real world. And I realize that I can't just keep waiting for the perfect time, because time is not waiting on me. Time keeps on going like an Energizer Bunny, and I want to be right on the side of him.

And I know I still have changes to make in my life. For example, smoking — I've been smoking for a while, and the only thing that was changing was the money in my pocket.

-Rell Diggidy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: As you say, some things don't change — like if you keep smoking, it keeps on costing you money. If you keep committing crimes, you will keep on serving time. And if you keep on changing from bad habits to good, your life will keep getting better just like it should. Some things don't change.

Changed, Outside and Inside

Since last year, I have changed a lot. I have grown on the outside and the inside.

I have changed in the way I think. I think about what's to come in life for the future. I think about what I need to do to make my life better, so that I can be what I want to be.

These changes came about because I finally realized that all those years I wasted getting drunk and high, I could have been finishing school. Or I could have been doing something positive with that time, something to help me along, so that when I get older I will have success in life.

-Lil' Phil, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Now that you're clean and sober for a minute in here, you realize how much time you've been wasting getting high and drunk. You're thinking clearly now and thinking about your future. Staying clear-headed is essential if you wish to follow through on your plan to do what you need to do to improve your life — get a GED? A high school diploma? A job? All three?

Changin' Ways

Well, I haven't changed in a lot of ways, not as far as coming to Juvi.

I can remember the first time I was here, for a petty assault-and-battery charge. It was my first time in the Hall, and my public pretender told me that I might be facing two-to-three years in the Y!

I laughed my ass off and thought it was a joke — until I caught this case! I know after I walk out these County doors, I am not coming back. Because this ain't the life to live. I learned my lesson, this time!

-Orozco, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Fear (of unwanted consequences — going to the Y, for example) can motivate you to change, but it's really like a jump-start. To maintain your positive attitude and behaviors, you also must want to change — want to succeed at school and go to college, or get that steady job and stack your pay. Okay?



On The Right Track

If I was given a six hour temporary release to show the judge how much I appreciate my freedom, if I were to convince the judge, I would videotape my house, my family, my pets, then show a videotape of my extended family at my grandmother's house for dinner. I'd show them my report cards, school, and my coaches and teammates, and maybe a couple of my practices.

Basically I would show them a routine day of my life. I would try and portray how much family and freedom will keep me sane and on the right track in life.

-Sane, San Mateo

From The Beat: We can tell how much family and freedom help keep you on trac from this piece you wrote. Do you think you'll be able to explain these feelings to the judge in words, instead of on videotape? Next time, please put your name down so that we can give you personalized props for your piece.

What Is "Sorry"?

Sorry is only a word
When people say "sorry"
They most likely don't mean it
Usually what they meant to say
Was — "oops, my bad"
Or — "I don't know what else to say"
Or because they can't
Express their true self/feelings
People say "sorry"
It's all right to say it but
Really mean it
Make it come from the heart
And not out your ass
When people say "sorry"
It's like sayin' —
"I love you" to a girl
You knew for only two days
It's only a word
If you don't mean it from the heart

-Bizzy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You break this down to the ground. So many words get used like bus passes, just to get you to your stop. It's a whole different thing when words come from the heart!

So Long

I been here so long
But now my days are getting short
Leaving in a couple of days
Soon I will part
To everyone who I got gustos for
Forever you have a spot in my heart
To the homegirls I see in church
Much agustas to y'all
Stay strong and don't give up
Push pull strive
Keep your eyes on the prize
To all the staff who gave me confidence
And helped me not to be institutionalized
One love
To my dawg counselor mcnabb
Get tall — "ha!"
Still gon' leave y'all with a smile
Been here for a while
But my journey is almost over
So until we meet again
So long

-Ben, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We hope never to see you again in these Halls, but you're more than welcome to stop by or give The Beat a call. And send us some lyrics about your successes and daily stresses!

To all the staff who gave me confidence
And helped me not to be institutionalized
One love
To my dawg counselor mcnabb

Success = Security

Success is being able to know
that your life is secure
and you are financially stable.
Success is knowing that you
graduated from school
and don't have to worry
about finding a good-paying job.
Success is knowing that you
can breathe the air God
gave you with no worries.
Success is being successful
at being successful.

-Danaron, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The road to success is paved with good habits. Just keep learning, doing what you're supposed to do — and success, becomes a habit, too.

My Brother

My brother has so much stress on him it looks like I'm adding weight onto his shoulders like a boulder. He was once in Iraq and now he is going back. He told me a story that he was so close to a rocket-propelled grenade hitting him and his Humvee. He's hella stressin' 'cause I'm finna go to CYA.

I feel hella bad 'cause he was trying to talk to me into stop doing what I'm doing, but I didn't listen. He might be there for a year — hopefully less if the war ends. When he comes back I will make sure to be free and not in a facility and with a job and education. I just want to make it up to him and show him I can do what he can do — a veteran of war.

-Rich, San Mateo

From The Beat: It trips us out that your brother — a man who's facing death in war on the daily — is stressin' over your situation, and we know you're feeling it as well. You're brother cares about you a lot and you know that. Having a goal in life to work towards to is a good thing. What will it take for you to keep them in mind when you go to the Y? Feel free to drop us a few lines.

Success

Success is good.
Success is the shhh.
Success is when I get to do the things that I want to do.
Success is when I'm doing well.
Success is when I'm with my mom having a good time.
Success is when I'm not locked up.
Success is when I'm teaching my brother good priorities.
Success is when I have a good relationship with my father.
Success is when I'm in school like college and doing what I have to do to not be on the streets as an adult.
Success is when my younger siblings look up to me.
Success is when I don't have a record.
Success is when I'm happy.
Success is when everyone around me is happy.
Success is when I'm loved and cared about; also when I love and care about.
So success is only for the good and I'm trying to get some good if you know what I mean.
Once I get out and do what I have to do to stay out is nothing but success.
Hope nothing but success to you. I'm out.

-Ju-Nut, San Mateo

From The Beat: Ju-Nut, sorry to hear about your sentence — we hope you can be successful doing your program there and always feel free to drop us a few lines on what's up. There's one line in here that's particularly telling, that bodes well: it's when you say that success is more than when you're loved and cared about, it's also when you love and care about others. It's that kind of realization that will take you far. We definitely hope you will find success once you get out.

county food is nasty as hell

How Have You Changed

Being in jail this time around gave me months to really sit back and think long and hard about my life and why, what reason?

One, because for a dude like me is getting older day by day, not younger, so with that I am going to take this lesson and run with it. So when a brother do get to a full adult, me and my family can sit back years from now, so I could teach my cousin and little ones around me — on some of my off days, because I do have a job waiting on me.

So with any help, some of these cats in here would do the same thing. Because it's nothing like being free, because county food is nasty as hell.

So with that said, stay out of jail.

-George, 150 Crew

From The Beat: "Stay out of jail". This is a nice start for some great advice. How do you intend to stay out? You're thinking about your life, getting older, and you don't want to spend it in jail, so how will you spend your life? What are alternatives to living a life of crime? What lessons do you have prepared to teach your little ones?

No Changing Here

Well to keep it P.I. like I always do, I really ain't made no change since I got caught up, besides trying to do it bigger when I get out. And to think about the way I got caught and what I did wrong, that's really about it.

As of right now I don't care about nothing. I don't think I'm ready to change at this moment even though I know that it's three yards to choose, which is the graveyard, the schoolyard, and the jail yard, which one of my OG patnas once told me.

But check this out I'm hard headed and I don't listen, yeah don't get me wrong yeah I hear you, but I ain't listening.

Straight up,

-Lil' Quan, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Lil' Quan, we appreciate your honesty. Who do you look up to? Who do you want to be like when you grow up? You NEED to listen to your OG homies, you NEED to know what options you have. You may not be listening, BUT recognize game when it's being thrown at you! Where are you going to end up? Now that you know about these yards, which one do you choose? PS, write us when you get to the pen.

it's three yards to choose, which is the graveyard, the schoolyard, and the jail yard

How Have You Changed

I consider myself to have changed dramatically during my stay here at the Hall. My thoughts, as well as my actions have changed.

I use to have a criminal mind, where I could do anything and not even give it a second thought. Now that my drug use has ceased and I've given my head a chance to clear up, I've realized how much wrong and pain I created.

These changes came about me through much discipline and staff encouragement. I hope that these changes stay permanent for my own benefit. Also, witnessing others, and listening to their experiences, I found that I, myself, do not want to go down that path in life. I also have come to the conclusion that without an education my life has a chance of leading down a dead end street that is why I have decided to pursue it and finish my last year of high school and attend college.

Those are my changes.

-D-Minus, 150 Crew

From The Beat: D-Minus, great! It makes us so happy to hear that. Why do you think most folks in the Hall, have a hard time making these changes? Or even want to? What makes you different? What was it that changed you? Do you think that the Hall is too tough, or not tough enough? How can others experience a positive change in attitude, like you did? What do you think?

Love Is When

I love it when
You're wit' me
I love it when
you smile
I love it when
you say you love me,
I loved it when
you had my first child
I love it when
we're together,
And hate it when
we're apart,
But now I realize
the love we had
is no longer
in both of our hearts.
Maybe it was when
I got locked
or it could've been before
But I know when I hear from you
my love grows more and more . . .
I love you

-Bizzy, Virginia

From The Beat: It's a heartfelt lyric you've delivered, Bizzy. Your heart has been bruised, but you are not bitter. That's a good sign for your future. And for your child's as well. How much will your child count on you "to be there"? If it's true love, it will come back.

I also have come to the conclusion that without an education my life has a chance of leading down a dead end street

I Shine

The camera is my destiny, but a year ago it wasn't. The reason why is, because there wasn't too much fame, including attention. And that's what I seemed to have wanted, money and acceptance for who I was.

But now in jail not too many thugs give hugs, not too many people show love, except the one who you love and the one who know who loves you deep down inside.

A lot of folks cry, but not wish to see you shine because they are dying inside. But I wouldn't be that guy to die inside and hate on the next guy. Why? It's because whatever I am or wherever I go, I shine.

Hair nappy or I'm feeling snappy. But not snappy enough, to be unhappy. I'm E, it's who I be, and you The Beat.

I write so you are who I meet. And I thank God for any camera that comes in all sorts of images, eyes of people, in the sky. Either way somewhere in my unknown safe I'm a good guy. To recognize the camera is the images, everywhere until I die. And I will still rise to be that same old guy, it's all I got.

Thanks Beat, y'all my peeps.

-Ewok, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Ewok, interesting writing. Your style is pretty abstract, you really keep us on our toes trying to translate your message. You do shine, that comes through in your writing. You're a good guy. Keep writing. Now, what is your plan to be that man who gives his all in all he can?

The Camera's Your Destiny

If I had to show the judge what freedom looks like, I would show him my everyday life. Ok, so you have six hours to show me why should I not lock you up.

I would show him my mom and grandmamma. My mom, because she showed me that I do not have to grind like some people to get what I need. And my grandmama for putting God in my life and showing me that following Christ is the way to go. So I just take it one day at a time and let God path my way.

-Lil' Read Head, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your grandma and mom must be strong women and it seems like you've learned a lot from them. Have you ever told your mom and grandma how much you appreciate them? What can you do to make them proud?



How Have You Changed?

Since last year, I've become more mature and I've learned to have more self-control, and I've learned to think more than once, even if my action doesn't change. The reason I say I've become more mature is because I've realized how important life, education, and family, are.

I say I've learned to have more self-control because I now ignore some of the things that I don't like from other people instead of what I would've done a year ago.

The last way I've changed is by thinking at least once before I do things, even if I don't change my action. Those are the ways I feel I've changed since last year.

Even though I still have a lot to work on, but those are the most valuable ones. The last change I have to make is my temper because certain things still get me a little upset, but I'm making a conscious effort because I can see a little in myself, so I know others are noticing it.

-Aj, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Keep up the effort and you will see results. We're glad to see that you've realized the important things in life and that nothing is worth risking all this time in a cell. Keep up your determination and keep your chest high throughout your struggles. What made you change? What made you realize that family and education are important?

I Want To Change

I feel that I have changed and I have it in me, that I'm gonna change.

The reason I want to change is because of my family. My family is the main reason I want to change my life around and be a better person. I have put my family through so much pain and put them through so much that I want to do something that will make them feel proud of me and not lose hope in me being able to change my life around.

My family is my all and everything I have to live for. It's tears my heart knowing that my family and my girl are suffering 'cause of me, and the decisions that I make.

I already lost my boo and I don't want to lose my family. It felt so bad when I lost the female that owned my heart and I can't imagine how it would feel to lose my family. I see homies without their family and I just don't know how they could live with that.

-Smiley, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That's a great reason to change. Losing your family is something that we hope you never have to deal with. We hope that you will go through with your plans to change. Not only will your family be proud of you, but also it will really show them how much you care about them. Can you win back the heart of your love? If it's true love, then it will come back to you.

Changes

I think that I have changed a lot in the eight months that I've been locked up. I've grown up a lot. I ain't the same person I used to be. Now, I be thinking before I do anything. I just be acting more mature than I used to be.

Also, my family, my girl, and everybody else that I know, has changed. I mean, my family ain't the same; they're more stressed because of me. My brother, he's been coo', now, since he turned 18.

My girl, she just ain't used to being without me, so she has to get used to the changes. And my friends, they just stopped doin' all that stupid mess 'cause they ain't tryin' to be up in here, or anywhere else.

-Lil' Carlos, 150-Crew

From The Beat: We know change is hard and it seems like you've made some positive changes. Do you think you can keep up what you've started once you're out? How can you help your family? How can you make up for lost time with your loved ones?

Running Away

My experience in running away from home and being out in the streets has been one of the hardest moments in my life. My life got all messed up 'cause I went to where I had everything to having nothing. There would be days when I wouldn't have a place to stay so I would have to be in the streets all day. I would have to stay up all night and not sleep so nothing would happen to me, like get raped. And some days I would kick back with all the "homies" which really weren't, so I would have a place to stay.

It was really hard for me to be out there 'cause there would be times when I wouldn't eat nothing for days. That's why I lost a lot of weight and I can' really eat normal anymore. There's a chance I could have anorexia or something like that. Well, with all the stress and depression 'cause of everything I was going through, I got into drugs.

-Anonymous, Maricopa/SEF, Arizona

From The Beat: Right now you have the time to reflect and ask yourself what's really worth it. Why did you run away? If you had a chance to do it over, or if you face a similar situation in the future, will you make different choices?

How Have I Changed?

I've changed in the last year a lot. I believe I've changed in life since last year. I do not know how I've changed, but I think I did good the last year in life. No matter how good I do, I come back to the Hall.

I do not do good to come back to the Hall. I like to be outs, but I cannot stay out. I like the 'hood, but I need to make good decision in life. They're going to place me in placement. I got to do good. I f I don't do good in my placement, I'm going to YA.

If the judge can drop my case, I will show my life in the 'hood. If he sees my community, he will know how my life is. He will know.

-Lil' J, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We know it's hard to do right when you are surrounded by all the temptations in the 'hood. But you have to discipline your self and learn how not to fall for those traps. Be a walking example and role model for the youngstas in the 'hood. You can make a change in your community, just by you changing the way you think. Good luck at your placement.

No matter how good I do, I come back to the Hall.

Check This Out

It's like I'm trapped in a maze
Walk around in a daze.
I won't rest till I'm paid
Or I'm down ta' my grave.
I wanna look tuff,
But my sneakaz' is scuffed.
Everyday pants in a week is enough,
I had a little money, but it came and it went.
Now it seems ta' pay the rent or stay in a tent
And it don't make sense.
How the shhh is intense,
And all you got up in ya pocket is lint,
Ya get the hint I had a cigarette fo' breakfast
Just fa' beginna's,
Pride fa' my lunch and sleep fa' dinna.
Try ta' go ta' church
Priest call me a sinna
He called me everything
Except fo' a winna.
I'm walkin' in the rain
I wish things would change
It ain't a game
They stripped all my rings and chains.
Emotionally scarred from getting took from the job
Time's is hard.

-Ginetty, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is a powerful and honest piece about your struggles. You really express how you feel trapped in your situation. You talk about trying to go to church — where else can you look for strength and support? You have a lot of talent with word play and rhyming... if you put your talent in the right place — you'll go far! Good luck.



What Makes You Smile

What makes me smile these days are just a few things: for one, my daddy; two, my love, Kevin; three, my little sister, Alicia. When I see the three of them I smile. It's like you're on top of the world, nothing or nobody can take that from me!

What makes me happy is being free, and being locked up takes that from me. I try my hardest to keep that smile on my face. What makes me smile is being in the arms of the boy I love, it's like he knows the true me. I know he cares and that's what holds a smile on my face.

What keeps me smiling is seeing my sister have that huge smile that can turn a frown into a big smile as time passes on. I haven't seen her but I keep her close in my heart! That's what makes me smile.

-Virginia, Maricopa/SEF, Arizona

From The Beat: Smile right now, girl, because you have a chance to leave this place and never come back. When you leave, leave with that smile, and the thought that if you come back, you won't be able to see your dad, your boy, or your sister. You can use that as a motivation to help you stay out.

Another Chance

If the camera were my destiny, I would take it and have someone tape me trying to get a job, enrolling in school, and getting my ID (picture) taken so I can get ready for jobs. Also, I would get my birth certificate.

Then, I would set up the camera at my home and show that my mom can control me and that my brother, sister, and me get along just fine.

I just want to show that I can do it if I get another chance.

-Yana-Bo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Education, work, important papers – you are on the right track to making your next chance a successful one. You may not have done it right the first time, but you've acquired the knowledge to succeed this time. You can do it!

Hustle

I had to hustle every day with no time to yawn
Through the struggle, never gave up hope,
You continued to stay strong
But still you can't forget
The pain you been through
Back in the days
When you would roll with ya crew
Homie through hard times
Never give up hope
'Cause at the end of today
Can be a better tomorrow
A better tomorrow
Just hang on through the night
I know our homies die
And I know it ain't right
But what can we do?
We're only a number
To these fake people that say we're all getting dumber
To tell you the truth
Us and them there's a difference
What most of us do
We do out of resentment
But us, we've lived true in our lives
You ain't seen nothin'
Never lived in strife
Bu I hope y'all stay strong
Keep ya heads up
Pray for a better tomorrow and never give up.

-Sara, Maricopa/SEF, Arizona

From The Beat: We all hustle hard, whether it's a legit job or on the block. Some people might have the same intentions you have but with different lifestyles. Life ain't easy for nobody 'till you find the meaning of it. But like you said "pray for a better tomorrow and never give up."

Try ta' go ta' church
Priest call me a sinna
He called me
everything
Except fo' a winna.

Love

I try to hide, recede inside my mind to be alone, so I can reflect the thoughts that collect about me when I was what I was, was who I was and who I am now.

I regret the tears and sweet, pain from the first time we meet. But like a drug you were addictive, a rush that I'd lust for. Unsure the cause but never the less had to have.

But in the end you brought me sorrow and pain, you are my downfall, you are LOVE.

-Kriminal Tendencies, Virginia

From The Beat: You've personified "love" here. What you write is more abstract than concrete, but we still get the general idea. Is love as an "addiction" a kind of temporary insanity, as some people might argue? Or is it "the most natural thing in the world"? Poets and psychologists have been confronting aspects of the question for generations. In any case, what have you learned about yourself from the pain love has brought?

But in the end you brought me sorrow and pain, you are my downfall, you are LOVE.

Siento Que He Cambiado

Hmmm, bueno pues yo siento que he cambiado porque antes no me importaba las cosas de este sistema y porque antes me peliaba por puras mieda, pero ahora ya no porque ahora me procupo más de las cosas personales y otras cosas de este sistema.

Por ejemplo en el caso que me encuentro, me van a mandar para CYA por un tiempo, porque según ellos dicen que ya tengo 18 años y por eso no me pueden mandar en otros programas. Y tambien porque ya estuve en el Rancho que es el LCRS. Antes que me mandaran al Rancho me iban a mandar para la pinta pero como sólo tenía 17 años, pues me dieron esa chanza. Ahora, si tan sólo me dieran un chanza más, y lo aprovechara para mejorar mi futuro porque ya no quiero vivir esta vida que estoy viviendo porque tengo muchas cosas importante en mi vida.

Por eso homies, les digo que si les dan una chanza, traten de aprovecharlo porque si no van a regresar y van a terminar como yo. Para mis homies que estan haciendo tiempo, cuando salgan piensen bien las cosas. Trucha homies y al rato.

From The Beat: Esperamos que ellos te otorguen esa sancha que esperas para poder hacer algo de tu vida. Bueno, amigo esperamos que sea lo que sea que hagan contigo, que busques la salida de tantos problemas, y que ocupes este tiempo para ver como puedes componer tu vida. Ya que te distes cuenta de las cosas importantes que tienes en tu vida, haz lo mejor de ti para mejorar tu presente y futuro.

I Feel I Have Changed

Hmmm, alright, well, I feel like I have changed, because I used to not care about this system and I used to get into fights over little things, but now I don't because now I'm more worried about personal things and other things about the system.

For example: In the case that I find myself in, they're going to send me to CYA for a while because they say I am 18 years old and they can't send me to any other programs, and also because I was already in the Ranch, which is LCRS. Before they sent me to the Ranch, they were going to send me to the pen', but since I was only 17 years old, well, they gave me that opportunity. Now, I wish they would just give me one more chance and I would take advantage of that opportunity to better my future, because I don't want to live this life that I am living anymore, because I have a lot of important things in my life.

-Lil' Droopy B4, SF/YGC

To The Youth

To the youth who stand strong through the struggle from the thugs, steady trying to bubble hold yo' head up my name is Vincent and I am back in the Hall facing serious charges. Some things I did, I knew was wrong and I had the choice to go the right direction but being that I didn't listen to my first instinct, I ended up back in Alameda County Juvenile Hall.

Some things in our lives we do because we have nothing else to do. But some people do wrong because there really is no other choice. Like me I grew up in the ghetto streets of Oakland. While growing up I hade no guidance. Like so many others like me, I needed to survive doing things that I could get locked up for, just to stay alive and it gets deeper.

The court system knows their young black males, Hispanic males and even females have it very bad to a point, we have no choice but to rob and steal. Just to eat and stay clothed. While living in the streets, often times I would find myself in situations that was like. "It's me or you! And being the person that I am I cannot allow myself to go out like that. Some of the people that I hang out with would say I am down, or say I am a beast. But I say I am just trying to stay alive.

For the most part I understand what a lot of people are going through. Right now I am facing time. A lot of time. I regret what I did to get myself here. But I have learned from my mistakes. And hope I can reach out to some one out there and let them know shhh ain't cool in the streets. At some point in our lives we have to allow ourselves to step away from the problem, instead of being part of it.

In the community we have a lot of natural leaders but these leaders are not using their leadership skills for the right things... To be continued

-Vincent, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Nice writing Vincent! Yes, so many youngsters are losing their lives to these streets. Do you think that them or you will ever find peace? Do you think that violence will ever come to a halt? Where do you think it started and how much of it is a higher beings fault? How much responsibility do you take for your actions? And, in your life do you think you'll ever find satisfaction?

In the community we have a lot of natural leaders but these leaders are not using their leadership skills for the right things

Success is Good

Success is good in a lot of different aspects .But me, I wanna have financial success so that I wont have to worry or struggle with bills. That's why when I get out and start school, I'm going to devote myself to school and work so that I will be successful in life.

Since I've been in here, I've had a lot of time to think about how I wanna live my life. I'm going to take the right path not the wrong.

-M B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Good start. Have you thought about college? You'll have to work hard to get what you want, but everything worthwhile is worth working for. There is more than bills that we have to take care of in life.

He Cambiado Y Estoy Desesperado

Durante el tiempo que he estado preso he cambiado mucho, estoy desesperado por salir de aqui y por eso estoy escribiendo esto. Todo aquel que está libre debería de pensar antes de hacer las cosas malas porque por eso es que yo estoy aqui pagando todo lo que he hecho. Por andar vendiendo drogas, estoy preso y eso no es bueno eso de andar haciendo. Por eso caen presos.

Yo tengo un mes y diez dias aqui por eso de andar vendiendo drogas y lo que estamos haciendo es matando a todo aquel quien consume drogas. Con ese tiempo que tengo de estar preso he aprendido que si algún día salgo de aqui, yo nunca en mi vida vuelvo a andar en cosas que pienso que me van a llevar a la cárcel. Por lo manos yo quiero darles este ejemplo: Nunca anden haciendo cosas que los pueda llevar a la cárcel.

Jesús nos ama a todos. Por favor, no hagan cosas malas.

From The Beat: Nos da mucho gusto saber que ahora estes dandonos ejemplos, las cuales son consejos a la vez. Creemos que has aprendido la lección de las consecuencias que traen las drogas. Sabemos que son muy dañinas, y por eso es que no deberíamos de jugar con ellas. Esperamos que todos aprendan de tus ejemplos y que vuevan a hacer cosas que los lleven a la cárcel o a otra cosa peor.

I've Changed And I'm Desperate

While I've been locked up, I've changed and I've been desperate to get out of here and that is why I'm writing this. Those who are free should think twice before doing wrong things, because that is the reason why I'm in here paying back all I've done. For selling drugs, I'm in here and that is not a good thing to do. That's a reason why you end up in here.

I've been here for a month and ten days for selling drugs, and all we are doing is killing those who use them. The time that I've done in here has taught me that if someday I get to get out, I'll never do another a thing that can lead me a jail. At least today I wanted to give you this example. Never do anything that can end you up in jail.

Jesus loves us all. Please, don't do bad things.

-Kerlin B1, SF/YGC

Si Pudiera Salir

Lo que yo haría es ir a visitar a mis primos y darles un buen abrazo porque los quiero ver y deseo estar libre para estar con ellos to do el tiempo que sea necesario. Prometo no andar en cosas malas porque uno se arrepiente cuando esta sin libertad porque la libertad es bonita. Es bonito poder ver hacia arriba y poder ver hacia abajo, poder ver las lindas montañas, ver que se mueven los árboles, poder sentir la frescura del aire, el calor del soy.

La verdad es que se que algun dia voy a estar libre,y poder ir a jugar con mis primos. Primeramente, Dios me va ayudar, y le pido a Dios que nunca voy a volver aser desgracias. Gracias por dejarme expresar lo que yo deseo. Hasta luego.

Adios.

From The Beat: Esperamos que esa promesa siempre la llebes en mente, porque la vida es muy linda y no vale la pena desperdiciarla de esa manera. Sólo acuerdate de las cosas que nos cuentas sobre la naturaleza, lo bello que es vivir afuera y ser libre, para que puedas ser feliz con tu gente.

If I Could Get Out

What I would do is go visit my cousins and give them a really tight hug because I want to see them, and I want to be free so I can be with them at every critical moment. I promise not to do bad things because one starts to regret things when one does not have their freedom, because freedom is beautiful. It's nice to look up at the sky and the ground, see the beautiful mountains, see trees move because of the wind, be able to feel the freshness of air, and the heat from the sun.

The truth is, I know I am going to be free someday and then I will be able to play with my cousins. First of all, God is going to help me, and I'm telling him that I will never do any bad things again. Thank you, Beat, for giving me the opportunity to express myself. Until later. Goodbye.

-Guillermo B1, SF/YGC



Ashton-Adogg, Cory and Shadow's Page

I Stand Alone

I stand alone
All on my own
Like a clone
Without the original being
And like an eye seeing
Without the other
Or like an older brother
With no one to look up to
I stand alone without you
To help me through
Life's obstacles to put me back
Without my hacky-sack
So I'm bored
Without my skateboard
There is no fun
For me, the only one
Of my kind
With only my mind
To help me to find
Some string to bind
My thoughts together
'Cause they are like the weather
They come and go as they
please
With the greatest of ease
I stand alone to the end
Without my friends.

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We really get how you are feeling in this poem. Your similes really bring out your emotions. But you are not alone; there is always someone who feels exactly what you're saying. What can you do to make the best of the situation you're in?

A New Man

I am a man now
And I think, "Wow."
How did I make 18 years
Livin' life with so many fears?
I never thought I'd make it this far
I always thought I'd be in the stars
Looking down on life without me
I wonder how that would be
I don't know what I'll do
From now until
The future of tomorrow
Will I feel sorrow
Or will I be happy?
Will my life still be crappy?
I look forward to it
'Cause every little bit
Of my manhood will be
Joy for me
'Cause I'll have children then
And nothing else will matter
My life will be phatter
Future life will make me happy
And not so crappy!

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What's your definition of a man? Can a 16 year old be a man? Why did it take an 18th birthday to finally make you realize that you are a man? It's only a day. Do you feel grown? How will you live your life differently now that you're eighteen? What do you think will be the best thing about being 18?

Love

Love can feel good
Or love can feel bad,
But in the end it makes you
sad
Love can come in many forms
It will come and go like storms
Love is like a dreadful pain
That will make you wanna cut
your veins
Love is something that is
complicated
And is something that is faded
Love should be feared
'Cause it is too painful
And it can make you
Or break you,
But don't let it take your life,
too!

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Which do you think is stronger — love or hate? "Cause you seem to have an intensity of both seeping through each of your poems! Love can be bad but that's depending on how far you wanna take it. And if somebody is getting hurt physically or emotionally in a loving relationship then that's not love. 'Cause love is love; ain't nothing else to it. Much love from The Beat!

How Have You Changed

I've changed in the ways of making a different future for myself. I'm going to make a studio, and make and produce beats, as well as make a record label and rap for it.

In the future I will also plan to be a chef and be known worldwide. These changes in my life will provide a better and legit future for me to ensure that I won't ever come back to the Hall.

To all my ninjas in the Hall, stay up fo' sho'.

-Ashton-Adogg, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Good for you Adogg. These are some good goals. How do you plan to accomplish all this. Remember the saying "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail" What kind of food are you gonna cook? We're hungry.

For My Girl

She's the beautiful girl that stayed by my side
Stayed faithful
Stayed loyal and ready to ride
It was you from the start
Only you have my heart
The other chicken heads were just playing a part
Through the rain through the pain
You are forever my girl
Only you Melissa are forever my world.

-Ashton-Adogg, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Beautiful piece. You should show this to Melissa. What is it about her that made her 'your girl', loyalty? What else? Tell us about her. What do the two of you do together? What is it going to be like the day you get out? Will you get to spend it with her?

In the Process of Change

Change takes time, but admitting you have a problem is the first step. It isn't easy at all but after time you will be a better person.

Understanding that a man isn't a beard on your face, it's being responsible for you and your family. I can say I am on my way to success. Stay up Abbas,

-Cory, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You got it right! Nuff said. Stay up Cory! Good luck with all that you do.

Freedom

Freedom to me is being a positive role model in the community. Meaning having a job, adhering and obeying the law, as well as staying drug free.

This might not sound like much but it will have a positive effect on you as well as others. Also I would like to relay the message to all listeners letting them know the system is not messing around with us.

-Cory, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Cory, you're right, the system isn't messing around. All the things that you mentioned are good examples of things that we can do to ensure our freedom. What is freedom to you? Do you think it means to be able to do whatever you want, whenever you want? Or could true freedom be something else? Can you have mental freedom without physical freedom?

Shadow's Page

The Difference Between Me An' You

All my life, I have been fighting for my right
To be treated like everyone else, constantly in a fight
For people to not judge me by sight
People always sayin' things to put me down
That's why I constantly frown,
But I like being odd
At least I know I'm not a fraud
Lookin' the same as you
Doing the same things you do
I like looking like a freakin' cook
And you need to eat your freakin' puke
'Cause that's the only way
You'll get noticed today
I'm going to look the same way
And am always going to say
Screw as every other word
Did you ever hear
Popeye say on cartoon cam
"I am what I am and that's all that I am"
Well, that's what I live by
And I always stay high
Don't ask me why
I look like a freakin' animal
And so you know, I'm not a criminal
I am just guilty of being different today
Acting like a teenager, I stay
'Cause it's the only way
For me to say
I don't give a damn today!

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You should give a damn today, 'cause it only took one day out of your life to not give a damn and have to suffer the consequence of being in a cell for a very long time. It only took a minute of a day; think about that. Now today or whenever you feel like you're ready — you can make a decision that will affect you for the rest of your life. Stop listening to what other people think about you and start listening to yourself.

I Wish, I Wish, I Wish

I am lost in the place
That makes me feel like a disgrace
All this mess feels like I'm in a box
That has so many locks
I couldn't get out with bolt-cutters
I wish I could flutter
Like a butterfly,
But I also wish I could die
I wish I had someone to talk to
That can help me to get through
This infinite pain
That keeps pouring on me like rain
I wish there was a way for me
To be what I think I should be
Without someone talking smack
'Cause I just about had it
I am seriously going to fall
Like an egg from the roof
That's 20 stories tall
The bruises on my arms
Take me from your harm
For only a minute
And I have piercings in the double digit
From the pain when I was out
I know I've lost it, without a doubt
'Cause I'm substituting pain for pain
I'm going insane!

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Be easy man. This pain is gonna be just for a short time. Be strong. You don't need to add to the pain. Sit down one day and meditate and evaluate and chill. You can always talk to one of us about your problems. We're here for you. Tell the haters; see you later.

I Miss You Guys

I miss my life on the outs
How I used to kick it with my friends
And pierce myself to no end
I miss my friend, Sunshine, and Scrubby
Kasia, David, Taco, and Tiffany
I miss kickin' it at Scrubby's house
To get a sack or a bottle of Remy
I miss kickin' it all night
Getting so drunk, in his backyard we fight
Drunken wrestling
Man, I'm telling you
it was the thing to do
Back then
I hope to do it again
I miss my friends
To infinity
The end.

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Friends make our lives happier. Are those the friends that helped you get put in here? It's okay to have fun, but getting sloppy drunk ain't coo'. You can't even remember what you did! Just do what you like to do but don't do anything that may bring you back here, unless you like being here.

Time

Why does the clock
Go tickity-tock?
And time flies by
I'm only one guy,
But I wonder why
Life has to be difficult
And it has to be pulled
To a stop like a bull
That is rampaging at full
'Cause life is living one day at a time
And why is there so much crime
I mean, 'cause I'm as sour as a lime
At life full of discrimination
I thought we were a nation
Of freedom of choice,
But the world is moist
And full of shallow people
That would judge a staple
Let alone me at a time like this
Man, I miss not being hated
And discriminated against,
But my time will come
And I'll be able to drink some rum
With my friends
With tingles up my spine, time sends!

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Interesting poem shadow. When your time does to drink that rum with your friends we hope you don't get into trouble and end up back here or somewhere else that you don't like. We all feel like an outcast at one time or another but in the end — every one gets what they deserve.

Shadows's Page

Another Nightmare

When the lights go out
The monster comes out
To make me shout
While he makes me scream
I cannot wake up from this dream
He shackles me to a wall
So I cannot fight at all
He is sharpening his blades
My life begins to fade
My heart begins to race
He throws a knife and hits my face
In my eye
I ask him, "Why
Did he chose me from many others?"
He throws another
And before it hits me,
I wake up to be
Tangled up in my blankets on the floor
I ask aloud, "What for
Do I keep having these nightmares
That makes my hairs
Stand on end
When my life is about to end?"

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: With each piece you write; your poetry becomes deeper and deeper. Get your courage out and fight that monster. No one else can fight him for you. You gotta do it yourself. We would if we could but that's your monster to fight; everybody got their own.

Problems

Why are there so many problems in society today?
Am I one of 'em?
Would you say I need to change for your benefit?
Even if you did, it won't change me
'Cause I like the way I be
And I want you to see
I'm not the problem
You are!

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Maybe we are all a part of the problem. But first, you need to start with yourself. If we can't change ourselves, then how can we expect to change others?

Suicidal Tendencies

I am all alone in here
There's so much that makes me fear
I need someone to wake me up
From this nightmare
That makes me wanna pull out all my hair
I'm hella pissed
That I could let such crap hurt me
Why can't people let me be?
I never hurt anybody
But they always hurt me
Sometimes, I think I'm being punished
For something I did in my past life
I wish everyone wasn't so queer,
So I wouldn't have to fear

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is only a fraction of your life — once you get out you have the option on never coming back. Stay strong; don't let the system or anybody else get you down, don't give them the satisfaction.

My Way Or The Highway

I am what I think I should be
And a lot of the stuff you say, don't bother me
And I like to be
All that I can be
And I like to hear you say,
"That guy should change his way,"
But I'm not going to change
'Cause then I can't be strange
And get free money
I like looking "funny"
'Cause it's what I like
So if you don't like the way I look
Then maybe you should book
A flight and go somewhere else
Where everyone looks the same
'Cause I'm making my name
Stand out like orange on black
And I'm a Goth from Hayward
And when I walk down my street
People got my back
'Cause to them, I'm "J-Nutty"
'Cause you molded me like putty
And I turned out a nutcase
And I like piercing my face!

-Shadow, 150-Crew

From The Beat: Don't pierce yourself shut — then we wouldn't hear what you have to say. You are showing us some pride and we hope you'll always stay proud of who you are. It's a good thing to be different — that's what makes you unique. Stay up and don't change for no one.

Sometimes, I think I'm being punished For something I did in my past life

Dear Beat Within

I am thinkin' about changing my name Shadow to something else 'cause I am having problems with my peers in my unit.

I am thinking about changing my name to Lost Soul or something like that. What do you think? Should I stick with my signature name? Or should I change it?

I really don't want to cause the name has so many memories behind it but I do 'cause people are using it against me. What do you think?

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We think that you should keep your name. Those that hate on you 'cause of your name are bored with their existence; they've got nothing else to do. Plus, you always write that you like being different and that you'll never change... so do just that. Be you.

Young Smokey's Page

Can't Sleep

What up, Beat! Today, Sunday, August eighth. Oops! My bad. It's Monday, the ninth — 'cause right now it's one a.m. and I can't sleep!

My room that I be in while I'm writin' this to The Beat, with the homie, Culero, here, like he in a coma — hella snorin' and shhh! But it don't bother me though. I'm from a loud city, and I'm used to hearin' noises at night.

The reason I can't sleep, is 'cause I been stressin' a lot lately; mostly 'bout my family, friends, and most of all, my court date on the sixteenth — wish me luck — but a lot about my family and friends!

In the last three years, I lost a lot of family and friends. Family-wise, I lost my grandma in 2002, eight days after I got done doing six months in Hillcrest. Then just two months ago, I lost my Great Uncle Carl. You might be like, "That's only two people;" — but these people I loved and cared 'bout! So to me, that's a lot!

Another way I lost family, besides death, is how I ain't been able to see my lil' cousins or nephews grow up. Like every time I see them, they in a different grade!

'Cause like in the past two years, I spent at least eighteen months locked up in either the Hall or Camp Glenwood, or in group homes in LA and in Vallejo, wit' a total of maybe four home passes! The other six months, I was on the run and couldn't be wit' my family.

And also I lost hella friends, or should I say acquaintances, over some shhh these foo's know didn't go down — but it shows ya what ninjas will do just to fit in, even if it mean changin' their opinion on and turnin' thei' back on thei' so-called homeboy! Only my real homies stuck by me and ain't stabbin' me like these other folks did!

See, this is why I can't sleep at night, 'cause I get to thinkin', and I get all mad and hyfey! Another thing that I been thinkin' 'bout, is … okay, look, there is this one white guy in my unit; he hella chill; he don't mess wit' nobody — so ninjas pick on him!

Ya know, they talk shhh, and I can tell it bothers him 'cause he tell me. But he don't say nothing back, just goes 'bout his shhh. And I get hella mad, 'cause these ninjas pick on someone that ain't doing nothing back — so what the point!

To me, that just a sign of weakness. Why pick on someone not on ya level? Know what I'm talkin' 'bout? Me and the homeboys stick up for him sometimes, but can't do it all the time!

Call me Captain Save-a-Dude, but all I'm sayin' is — why not pick on someone that do something back, like … me! 'Cause I was raised like a pit bull terrier, but I don't like to bark — I love to bite! So do what ya do! Well, now I got trash off my mind, so let's see if I can go to sleep … damn … I can't … naw, just playin' … all right, Beat … I'm ghost!

-Young Smokey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: First off, we want to say, if we sound too hard or critical in our responses to your amazing pieces, poetry and essays both, amazing — if we sound too hard, we're not judging you or putting you down or trying to make you mad; but when you see someone walking into a trap, it's just natural to shout out warning! Look out! Stop! Ay! So, that's all we mean to do. 'Cause we feel your heart in your words, always (even in that bogus love poem this week); and we feel your pain and your grief and your pride and your anger. And a whole lot of readers look for you each week and feel you, too. You've been through a lot, and you're still going through it. We even feel you on this Captain Save-a-Dude story, and you're right that they're cowardly and weak; but that doesn't mean your rushing into battle is a virtue. We appreciate your sentiment, but you need to practice restraint — and your temper is not always so well directed. We were about to say: Stay up — but instead we'll say: Get some sleep!

look, there is this one white guy in my unit; he hella chill; he don't mess wit' nobody — so ninjas pick on him!

Love Song

Mija can I tell you something
I just love that pretty smile
And that beautiful brown hair
Just got me going wild
But I'm not here to flatter ya
Wit' words I speak
Everything I say is true
And ya heart is what I seek
Baby girl I'm not going to lie to ya
I'm only going to keep it real
Not into playin' games
Or for me ya heart to steal
Just want to spend time wit' ya
And tell ya how I feel
When we first met
I was puttin' up my gangsta image
After bein' wit' ya so long
Ya push me to the limit
To show ya that there
Is two sides of Smokey
There's the gang-banged-out
Thug that I be
Then there's the soft cuddly side
That makes ya want to love me
Have ya dedicating songs
Like the oldie, "Angel Baby"
The dreams we have 'bout the future
To me are very special
And the love that ya show me
Is very sentimental
And I promise one day
Our dreams will come true
Especially the one
Of me marrying you
Out of my whole lifetime
I never met a girl like you
You ask how many females
I been wit'
There's been a few
But like I said
None can ever compare to you
Since we been together
I feel like ya made me brand new
I can express myself more
'cause the things ya do
The homies always laugh
'Cause I always go around
My lil' city
Talkin' 'bout the love that I found
Never said this before
But I'm happy we together
And I put this on everything
I'll love you always and forever
[Note: I ain't wrote this to no one
I wrote it 'cause the homie Lil' Gato
Was writin' one so I wanted to see
Who y'all thought was better —
So readers hit us up in The Beat
And say what y'all think]

-Young Smokey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Loquacious as it is audacious, voracious and straight up mendacious! Therefore, we pray, ladies, don't fall prey to dissembling phrases spit between a "gang-banged-out" thug's criminal cases. You deserve better than a dozen identical letters from the pen' with a dozen identical poems enclosed within. (Don't get mad, Smoke; just a pointed joke — you know we love you!)

Young Smokey's Page

Life Of Crime

Police comin'
Homes swallow ya product
Later drink some milk
Go to the sink and vomit
Throw up ya sacks
Then clean the mess wit' comet
Don't know 'bout ya
But don't want my house
To smell like arm pit
Might not seem glamorous
But it's a way to make scratch
Hit the cut 'cause a case
I don't want to catch
Dope got these fien's like dogs
I'm the ball they want to fetch
Ninja act up in the cut
I handle business
Fien's walkin' up
All dirty and red-eyed
Say they only got four dollars
But it cost five to get high
Beggin' and pleadin'
Just this once let it slide
I'm so sorry homes
Better luck next time
Can't feel bad
Everyday thing in this life of crime
Don't want to sell drugs forever
So tryin' to perfect my rhymes
'Cause it's just a matter of time
Before the feds catch on
An' when they do
I'm packin' up an' I'm gone
Some people say
The way I live is wrong
What ya expect me to do with a g-e-d
Wit' that a young ninja like me
Can't even get in the military
So I'ma continue to be on these streets
An' make me a profit
Stay hyfey an' smashin' on brats
Like white dudes in a mosh pit
Pray every night that in time
I'll wake up
An' everything will be fine
Stress free
The day I retire from this life of crime

-Young Smokey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The feds know now, so why go back to how you were living before. All that's left now is desperation, then locked doors. You're already facing incarceration, why ask for more? Beyond questions of right and wrong, you know this can't go on. You were born into it and couldn't see through it. And when you wake up, it's anything but stress free — your life's a wreck and that's what you see! But the only way it will ever get better, is retire from your life of crime before you get wetter. Put your rhymes on a positive tip, before you lose your grip altogether.

I'm Puerto Rican and Mexican

What up, Beat! It ya boy, the one and only, Young Smokey, from South San Francisco.

But, anyway, I'm kind of mad 'bout something. In my flow, "Like a Pit" — in ya response, ya said something 'bout me being a Black male. But I'm not. I don't even look Black. I'm Puerto Rican and Mexican! I just want to get that coo'.

But I'm also hella mad 'cause some staff over here be racist towards Latinos! It's like staff show more love towards Blacks than the Latins. But now don't get me twisted — 'cause I got Black folks, too!

And when I talk to staff 'bout it, they like — "No, we don't!" But the truth is that the majority of staff here in Alameda County Juvenile Hall, is Black; and it shows in how detainees get treated.

Now I'm not going to go into details, but to me — this trash is messed up! And it got me hella mad!

-Young Smokey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We went back and read our response to "Like a Pit" — and what we meant to write was, "You might have one more minute in the sun before the trap snaps shut. Don't be one more brown man dead or locked up!" We apologize and realize that racism comes in all shades, plus even when it's not intended, mistakes are made. And we fully agree, whether in Juvenile Hall or the pages of The Beat, we need to get past the skin and see the spirit within! Sorry, Smokey, it won't happen again.

Dream

Something is wrong
I'm too deep in these streets
Seein' visions of bloody bodies
Laid out on concrete
Walkin' on the sidewalk
Glance at the chalk line
Look at the city police wit' a body
Realize it's mine
I'm scared and confused
Wonderin' how this could've happened
I see my mom in the crowd
Wipin' her tears wit' a napkin
As I make my way
Through the crowd to comfort her
I walk up to moms
Try to give a hug but go through her
All of a sudden I get it
I must be in spirit form
But then reality hits
And now my heart torn
It pierces my heart
Like a hand by a thorn
See the coroners make it
Through the crowd by tootin' his horn
Lookin' at the police escort yell
"come on people make some way here"
The detectives say something to my mom
Which I cannot hear
She burst into tears
As her mourning begins
I look back at my body
Then everything gets dim
I close my eyes then reopen them
Then see a light
Try to shield my eyes
'Cause it's so very bright
But I manage to get a glimpse
It's such a beautiful sight
Something starts to pull me away
But I put up a fight
I struggle to get back
Wit' all of my might
Then I collapse
And end up in a dark place
I'm scared to death
And tears run down my face
As I see a picture of my family
Then all of a sudden it is erased
It gets real hot
All I want is some water to taste
Flames erupt
Then I awake
Thank God it was just a dream

-Young Smokey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Take that last line seriously, 'cause that dream was a prophecy — but not of what has to be, unless you refuse to wake and see that you need to agree before it's too late to change your everyday reality and change your fate! Your decisions, your behaviors, your gangster life and all its flavors; have got to change! Your heart, mind and soul, have got to be rearranged! 'Cause you're in spirit form right here today in this world of flesh and clay, and your spirit spoke to you in your sleep, okay? A message from God: Make a decision to change your ways, bottom to top, from the inside out — change the life that you're living, and all will be forgiven! Amen. On Mama's!

Culero's Page

Memorizing The Days

I still remember the first day we met, kicking it at the homeboy's house. All the homeboys tried to spit game at you, but you just ignored it. Then I came up to you, knowing more about you.

Then I found out that you just lived down the street from me. So we started to kick it more. Then it was the favorite day of our lives, November twenty-fifth of the year, two thousand and three: Kicking it at your stairs, when out of nowhere — there goes a shooting star!

That's when I knew you had to be mines. So I spoke the best five words I have ever spoken, "Would you be my girl?" And your response was, "Yes." I could never forget that day! It was a dream come true! But now I'm in this boring ol' place, wishing I could see you.

I don't know if you put a spell on me or what, but whatever it did, I just wanted to tell you that I love you so much! Man! Baby, I remember when we first met! Who would be knowing that we would last this long? And can't stop thinking of each other!

You have shown me so much respect for a female, not to disrespect another female's private parts. And so much that I didn't know about respect.

Man! Baby, do you remember the saying, "You don't know how much you love someone until that someone is gone." Man! I have started to feel that saying, because I'm missing you every minute that passes by! The point of this letter is that I miss your sexy smile, and everything else about you, too!

I wish that I could write it, but it's just unexplainable. So, till I go to Camp and get my pass, I just wanted to say that I love you — and I hope to see you soon. Your boy, Culero.

-Culero, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Last week you shot us love lyrics by Ashanti, which we didn't print. But, truth to tell, the words you write in this letter convey more of your heartfelt love than could any borrowed poem. Your words are particular to your unique relationship with her, and reading them, she'll know they could be meant for no one else. That part about what you've learned from her, tells her and the whole world that this thing is something real. And it shows respect, you feel!



I Remember the Day

As I sit here reminiscing
About the day we met
It isn't hard to remember
It was in the city of Hayward
Evening time the twenty-second of November
What I remember the most
Is your inner and outer beauty
I could tell you were special
And not your average cutie
I really liked you personally
Plus you were very attractive
As I got to know you better
I started to love you
In ways that are massive
The night that we were kicking it
And together we saw that shooting star
I looked into you eyes and saw
My soul mate which you are
I took you by the hand
And asked you to be my lady
Then you gave me a look as if saying
I don't know maybe
Then after a few moments
You said you would be my baby
And now you're that special Mexican girl
That drives me crazy

-Culero, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's a treat to read a letter and a poem, reflecting the same emotions; the same love and affection you send in your special Mexican girl's direction. Now you've got a reason to stop living so crazy in the street, 'cause this love in your heart goes deeper than deep — and she deserves more than a banger under lock and key.

the trees kept me hella lazy and not wanting to do nothing

Drogas

Yo! What's up Beat! You know who this be, if not — well, this that homeboy, Culero, kicking it with y'all! Well now, the question is, "Did I change?"

Well not to be funny or nothing, and to keep it real, it was the drugs I did before — weed, drink, and crystal meth! So I don't do meth no more. And I kinda don't smoke trees how I did before, 'cause I'm on probation; so I stay low.

So that's why I changed — I'd always be hella jumpy, running around acting a fool. But then the trees kept me hella lazy and not wanting to do nothing. And I'd use the drink to get me all romantic with a female. Then I'd use crystal meth to get me to stop acting lazy.

So that's what changed me and how. But I'm fit to bounce now, so holla at'cha laters. One. From the homie,

-Culero, 150 Crew

From The Beat: With this love for your girl living large in your heart, you've got an important reason — beyond probation — to keep this change alive. Reading what you say, it sounds like it all starts with the weed. Will you be able to keep it under control when you're off probation? Seriously, it could make or break this relationship; and the meth doesn't solve the weed problem — it just adds another problem to the first. You feel? Stay clean!

Friskie and Lil' JJ's Page

Weekly Writing

Someone I admire
Is in within these walls
He is a wonderful writer
When my spirit falls
His writing makes me get the chills
As I read his words
I feel so many thrills
I'm filled with hope
Even without my dope
His words speak such truth
He is so young
In his youth.

-Friskie, San Mateo

From The Beat: Man, we know that feeling — we get it every week in workshops and in reading through The Beat. There is such power in what you and your peers write each week, and it is heartening to know that you feel it as well. Thanks for contributing to, and recognizing, the community that is The Beat Within.

Unforgettable Drink

As I pick up the drink
My eyes begin to sink
I feel like a slob
I begin to stand
With bottle in hand
I begin to walk
I stumble to the ground
Not making a sound
No one is around
I am left unfound
I am going to drown
I feel like a clown.

-Lil' JJ, San Mateo

From The Beat: What a clear-eyed and sobering look at what alcohol can do — these few short lines make us feel just how terrible and lonely the life of the alcoholic can be. How can you avoid picking up that bottle, especially knowing that this is where it is leading? What will it take to begin to take control of your life back from the bottle?

Daddy's Girl

People always make fun
Because I treat my dad
As if he's the shining sun
To me, my dad is the best
He's better than all
Including those who have been put to rest
My dad can never fall
True, for a while my dad and me
Had to be apart
But another truth is that
I love my dad with all my heart
He has been there for me in so many ways
I have not seen my daddy
For so many days
I'm my daddy's little girl
And my daddy makes everything okay
And when I get out
My daddy is the one whom
I am going to obey
The love I have for my dad
I cannot put into words
If I lost my dad
I would no longer have love for life
The running deer or singing birds
My daddy is a man
Who makes everything okay
I never want to go away again
Wherever my daddy is, is where I want to stay
I may not have a mom
And he may not have a wife
But I have my daddy
So therefore I have life.

-Friskie, San Mateo

From The Beat: We hope you send a copy of this piece to your dad — it's a beautiful tribute, and no one will feel it more than he will. What led to your dad going away when he left? How can you make sure that you're able to stay on the outs so that you can spend time with him? What's it going to take for daddy's little girl to grow up into the woman he would love for you to be?

There is a mind Waiting to be set free

Hillcrest Juvenile Hall

I hate this place with a passion
More than anyone could ever imagine
From the spit on the walls
To the shhh stains in my drawers
From the locks on the doors
To the extremely cold floors
From my hard bed
To the crap we get fed
From the crappy clothes we wear
To how much we are treated unfair
From the bars in the windows
To how slow your time goes
Some staff are hella mean
Because to them, your life
Doesn't mean a damn thing
Some staff don't care how you feel
You're just another paycheck
That they unseal
I could go on and on
But it would take f
orever too long
When I get out
I will never come back
And that is a fact
I'm out.

-Lil' JJ, San Mateo

From The Beat: Do you think you'd be as serious about not coming back if the Hall was a more pleasant place. If you were in charge, how would you change the way Hillcrest works? Why do you say that some staff don't care how you feel? What about the other staff — are there some who do care and who you respect? What's it going to take for you to make good on your pledge never to return? How are you going to live your life on the outs so that you don't come back to the Hall?

Behind The Bars

Behind the bars
There is a good girl
Waiting to get out
Behind the bars
There is a heart
Waiting to love again
Behind the bars
There is a mind
Waiting to be set free
Behind the bars
Is where I wait
And I don't think I can
Wait anymore

-Sad Girl

From The Beat: When you feel like you just can't wait any longer, what is it that keeps you going? How can you exercise your mind, even while you remain behind bars? What will the good girl do when she is set free and returns to the outs?

Dario and Kevin's Page

People Change, I Changed

True, people do change. I think I've changed, because if you don't — you will always be the same!

Last year, I was so hardheaded, and I was always hitting someone or taking something from somebody. I didn't care about nobody but my family and my girlfriend.

Yet my girl always told me to stop! And that is my mother's wish as well. And I will stop when I get my freedom.

-Kevin, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What about in here? Are you always ready to start chunking 'em or smash on someone? 'Cause you need to start the change in here if you want it to last out there. Do it, for those who care!

They understand me. They were there for me when nobody else was. I don't even consider them as merely friends — I consider them to be my 'hood family

I Have Changed Significantly

I think I have changed significantly in my life, from how I was when I was younger to how I am now. I think I am way different than I was a year ago.

A year ago, I was a little square in my mind. I wouldn't kick it with the homies. I would stay home and talk to my girl all day. I think about it now, and I wish I wouldn't have acted the way I did before. But after I broke up with her, I started kicking it again; and I was kicking it a lot. I loved it though.

The friends I met were hella good to me. They treated me as if I was their family! They were sav's in my eyes. My best friend, Danny Boy, brought me into the 'hood and introduced me to many of my friends now. Even though I might have done a few bad things, I don't regret it.

But, since being locked up for this case, I kind of have a different perspective — to be coo' for a while and stay out of as much trouble as I can. But that don't mean I'm gonna stop kicking it with my loved ones. I ain't gonna just start dissing all of 'em all of a sudden. I know they would never do that to me.

-Dario, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You know, if you play it coo' for a while and try to stay out of trouble — your friends will start dissing you. They'll call you a square and they'll tease you. It will start out as jokes, but you won't like it. So then you might start trying to prove how down you are, or how crazy, or whatever. Then, next thing you know you're back in here for some foolish thing you did — or the guy next to you did, and you were just there when it happened. It's no coincidence that you and Danny Boy are in max. Look out where you're going, 'cause you'll regret it when you get there!

Show the Judge I'm Not Bad

If I had that camera for six hours, and I went out to make a video — I'd show the judge that I will go to school half a day every day. And I will also find a good job, a job that he will think is good.

You know I think about my family every day, 'cause you don't know what might happen to somebody — and it could be someone that I love or it could be anybody!

No joke, I would show the judge what I think he would really want to see. But I would have to be free, if I am going to show the judge how I am when I'm on the outs.

He will see that I'm not a bad kid at all. I am a young kid that likes to be with my mom and my grandmama. Then he will see if I should be doing time or not — not!

-Kevin, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We believe you're a good kid and that it would show in your video. Your plan to go back to school half-days and work at a job is a good one. But, how'd you mess up before? What are the temptations you'll face? How will you avoid them? What's changed? 'Cause even good kids can do bad things.

On Camera: My House, My Family and Friends

If I were to have to tape a video for six hours, the type of footage I would include would be my house. The reason for my house, because — it's my house!

I can do whatever I want freely in my house. I'm not locked in a room with just one window and a small mattress with thin blankets. I can go wherever I want in the house.

Then I would go outside and walk around. The reason for that is because I have the freedom to walk around — anywhere I want to, without getting in trouble. There's no restricted area for me to be in.

Then I would include my family and friends in my video; my family, because — it's my family! They're the people I'll love, no matter what; the people that come visit me; the people that accept my collect calls when I call! They will always be there for me, no matter what.

And I'll include my friends because they have helped me get through this life. They're always there for me. They understand me. They were there for me when nobody else was. I don't even consider them as merely friends — I consider them to be my 'hood family! Much love to them all.

-Dario, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We understand that this video shows what freedom means to you — your home, your 'hood, your family and your friends! And a judge would like seeing your home and your family, and depending on where you go in it, your 'hood. But if you go video you and your friends over at the park or by the tracks or wherever, soakin' and smokin' — well, it may feel like love to you, but a judge won't see it as a positive contribution to your community or your home. What about school? What about a job? Freedom also means responsibility. Don't you know that's the way judges think? What do you think about responsibilities?

after I broke up with her, I started kicking it again

Matt and Abbas' Page

I'm Totally Different

I've changed a lot since my incarceration. I've changed my ways of thinking, my ways of reacting to someone else's negative remarks. I've changed the way I talk, walk, and even smile.

I'm definitely different today than I was a year ago. A year ago, I was out of control and had lost my mind. Now I'm totally different. I think before I react. I'm courteous to people; I have respect.

I view life differently also. A year ago, I thought life was all fun and games and doing drugs. Now I view life as opportunities waiting to happen. I feel strong enough to go back into my home and control myself — and prove I've changed.

My incarceration had a great deal to do with the changes I've made. Also my religion has helped me change. I think my life was out of control — and that's why Allah has put me in this situation. Peace!

-Abbas, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your accomplishment is great. Many promise to change after they're released, but you've realized that change begins here and now. Change is always "an inside job" — meaning: real and significant change takes place inside your heart, mind and soul; then outside behaviors and actions manifest who you are now. Yes, you will still be tested when you're released; and you will need to prove yourself when you get home; but be patient with yourself and others. Keep faith.



Success = Career, Family, and Home

What success means to me starts with me getting my GED so that I can get a good-paying job.

Then I want to buy a nice-sized house, get married, have three or four kids, and just be livin' a good life — a life of staying out of jail, going to work every day on time, and doing what I'm supposed to, obeying all laws, just staying out of trouble, living a good life by my family's side, taking care of priorities, and doing what I have to do.

Success is just having a good career, and a wife and kids, and a house to live in. Well, there's lots more, too, but I have to go. So until next time — I love you Gabriella and Maressa, bye!

-Matt, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We feel you on this. Just seeing where you want to go, points you in the right direction. Keep your eyes on that prize and you will arrive. Much love to you and your little family.

Candid Camera

The first thing I would show the camera, is me returning home and seeing my family. And the camera would follow me around our home.

Next I would go to a high school and enroll in it. Then I would go to the mosque and pray. I would also go to my cousin's grave and my grandmother's — and talk to them!

I would spend the last hours of my time, talking to the judge and explaining how my incarceration has changed my life. I would also ask the judge to give me one chance, and if I mess up — he could lock me up for the rest of my life!

-Abbas, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your video and all it shows about who you've become, the seriousness of your commitment to living a life of compassion, responsibility and love — would be persuasive indeed! Props. Peace.

How I've Changed

I think I've changed a lot in the past six months of being incarcerated. I've become more of a man than I was before I got locked up.

Being locked up, showed me how much my freedom really means to me; also being locked up has shown me what I'm really missing out on.

One of the things I'm missing out on the most, is seeing my daughter's first experiences and accomplishments. It's like when I get out, I'm going to do everything in my power to stay out and get a job to take care of my daughter and my future wife.

I've also changed my ways of thinking and reacting to certain things. And it's like, once I get out, I ain't doing shhh like I used to — like I ain't getting high no more! I ain't going to be kicking it like I used to; the only kicking it I'm going to be doing is kicking at my job — do some real working; or kicking at home with my daughter where I can't get into trouble.

I'm tired of this place. This is not the way I want to live my life! But once I get out, my family will see how much I've changed — and I know they will really be happy, just like I will be. So, until next time, I love you Gabriella and Maressa; bye!

-Matt, 150 Crew

From The Beat: There has been a big change in your thinking. Now you're focusing on what it will take to remain free once you're released, and you realize that means you can't just go back to what you used to do. So many young men spend their time locked up just daydreaming about getting out, soaking and smoking as they kick it with the homies — and they don't think a thought beyond that. And because they fail to plan, it's like they plan to fail. Clearly, you're making plans to succeed!

I'm tired of this place. This is not the way I want to live my life!

"How Have You Changed?"

My Change

Since last year I changed in a couple of ways:
I stopped getting loaded every day
I started to think of things I wasn't thinking of
I started giving a shhh
I went into the tuck
But still, I'm in jail stuck!

-Noco

From The Beat: Well, this is probably a sign that you still have a few things in your life that you need to change. Ya' think? What are you in the Hall for, this time? Is it something that could have been prevented, had you made a smarter decision? You've made some good changes so far, that is a great start. But now you need to make a few more. Only you know what they are.

Gettin' Older and Wiser

The way I've changed, first off, is by gettin' older and wiser. Now it seems like I do the same thing, but just a little smarter.

But I know I do wrong, I just don't be dumb about the situation. I still do things like soak 'em at Kennedy Park with the homies and barbecue. The only thing that's changed is, more food and more beer — and me changin' from being sober at first to being drunk at the end of the night.

But now, I've also changed because I've had to take responsibilities of my own, because won't no one do shhh for you as you get older. And it ain't no joke, kickin' it on the block with cutthroats; know what I mean? You got to hustle for yourself. You gots to put it down for yourself and bang to the fullest for yourself — because if you don't, then you would be nothing.

So those are some ways I had to change, or else I would be a nobody — and that ain't me. It's 'hood shhh, and you might not know nothin' about it, but the real homies know what I mean. What's up to all my folks in the Hall and at Camp.

-Mono

From The Beat: Here's the deal on getting smarter about doing the same old stupid things: maybe you defer the consequences but you don't escape them! And how smart is that really? And as for keeping your reputation on the block, that motivation will have you doing the same thing on the cellblock — and it doesn't have to be that way. That reputation won't unlock your door or keep you warm at night. So think about making your pay another way now that you're getting older. Think about being a man.

I have changed since last year in a good way.

Changin' My Ways

One year from today, I was exactly where I am now. I only changed in some ways. I've gotten wiser from all the books I've been reading and I've matured a lot, as well. I got one year older, as well.

I always think about what I would be doing if I were still on the outs and never came to this place. Maybe I won't be doing coo' or maybe I would be better off, which I think I would. My appearance ain't changed that much. I think I've gained a little weight off this county food, but I'm still short. I ain't mad at all, though, 'cause I still gets mine on the outs.

That's one of the reasons why I need to see the outs as soon as possible. On another note, I'm still the same person I've always been.

-Lil' John

From The Beat: We hope you try to make positive changes when you get out because it takes a lot of effort to stay on the right path. A lot of people make that turn on the right path but don't stay on it, they end up switching to another path, but stay focused and keep your head up and before you know it – you'll be on easy street!

I Try Not To Sin

I really can't say I changed but I sometimes think I did. I try not to sin but growin' up around sins and watching people do nothing but sin, it's kinda hard to not sin. I can't blame nobody else for what I do 'cause I'm my own person and I do my own thang.

Even when I do sin, I ask God to forgive me for what I did. But sometimes I will go out and sin again.

I try not to sin but they ain't givin' no jobs to young black men, so we sell drugs and sellin' drugs is a sin. Damn the sin always wins.

-Young Mighty

From The Beat: Hmmm, Young Mighty, why do you say that selling drugs is a sin? Is it because it is illegal? Have you ever heard of the debate about 'stealing a loaf of bread for your starving child'? Is it really a crime? Where do you think the crime or sin is, in selling drugs? Is there a difference if it is money to feed a starving family or to by a scraper on spinners? Tell us in your next piece, what you think?

How Young Gato Changed

Well, what's up homeboys? It's me, ya boy, Young Gato, chillin' up at max with the homies. Well, I've changed a lot over the years — some for the good, some for the bad.

I really changed when I got on probation. I started coming to the Hall and messin' up. I remember when I first came to the Hall, someone told me this is going to be the maker or the breaker! Either I was going to stop there and never come back to the Hall, or come back eventually — by not learning from that first time!

Well, for those who know me, you know that I'm a little hardheaded. So I came back … left … came back … etc.

This is my seventh time in the Hall, and I think I got it now! I mean, I ain't going to stop bangin' because that shhh for life, ya feel me? But I know I'm going to stop coming back to the Hall, because this shhh is pissy.

Hopefully, they will let me go back to Camp, so I can be with the homies chillin'. To all the homies up there at Camp, be coo' — stay strong. To my homies in the Hall, don't trip — we're going to get out someday! Alrato.

-Young Gato

From The Beat: We feel the sincerity of this piece, but other than recognizing that the Hall is no place to choose to be — we don't see your plan. What will you do differently so that you won't be back for an eighth time? We know you love your homies, but we seriously doubt they can help you out with this. You're chilling with homies now in max; you were chilling with homies back at Camp; and you'll be chilling with homies at the Y, jail or pen' — if and when, you don't do things differently in reality.

Changed None

Well I haven't changed none since I've been locked up in the Hall. So I don't know why, but I'm still the same ninja.

When I get out, I'm going to be the same ninja on the block doing my thang, making a lot of money. So I need some help to stay out of the Hall, and I need help to get out the game because I'm going to have some kids soon. So, I can't change my life, but I'm going to try to change my life.

-Lil' Scoot

From The Beat: That's a good start. Try. Asking for help is a brave thing to do, which is a good place to start. You can't do the same shhh and expect different results. Except this time not only you will suffer but your kids will too! You need to decide, what's important to you. You wanna have kids — well, think about them. What's in their best interest, for you? A life of some bullshhh and jail? Or a life with their father around? You decide. If your man enough to have sex then be man enough to take care of your business.

I Haven't Changed

Well, I haven't really changed. I am just doin' the same stuff, keeping it live. And I just started my time at Camp Sweeney today, the seventeenth of August!

I was like, "Damn!" when they said, "Release," after being in the Hall for four months. I thought they were just joking with me until I got to receiving and then I cut.

I only got four-to-six months to do, so I am just going to keep it cool up here until I'm done with my time.

-Oro

From The Beat: Okay, better to do a good program than not; Camp's better than the Hall. But it's better still to change how you're living, 'cause freedom's better than incarceration.

Changes

I have changed by doing stuff I never did before.

-Marcus

From The Beat: Like what? Please elaborate.

Good And Bad

I have changed for the good and the bad. I have grown to be a menace to society but I grown to love my family and honor the things my parents have taught me.

But on the other hand, I have come to love this Oakland game I play by. Will I ever go good... nope, I say out with the good and in with the bad.

The way I see it: live by gun die by the gun.

-Elijah

From The Beat: If you have grown to love your parents and honor the things they have taught you, then do you think that you might put the things they say to use? Why do you insist on doing the bad? It will only break your parent's hearts and keep you locked down. Wake up before it's too late!

Changed

I have changed since last year in a good way. Well, I haven't because I'm here writing this bullshhh again when I could be at home sleeping in my own shhh, wearing my own shhh also.

-P-Daddy

From The Beat: In what ways do you want to change next year? With every passing year, do you hope to grow?

I've Changed

I have changed since last year, because I was immature. But now, since I'm eighteen years old and a grown woman, I can't afford to cat off no more.

Ever since I changed, I've felt better about myself. I changed my way and my attitude. And since I've done that, I gets all the respect!

-Lil' Mama Hanna

From The Beat: We've witnessed the change and wish to offer you our propers. Much love and respect.

The Way I Changed

I think my ways got worse than they were a year ago, 'cause I started kicking it harder.

And that's when I started going to jail and doing things I shouldn't be doing. When the streets changed, I think I got worse — but I'm out. Stay up Gato an' Armon. See you soon at Camp. Keep your head up.

-Droopy

From The Beat: Explain what you mean by the streets changing. And tell us, are you going to keep getting worse? Why? We know you don't like be locked up — do you?

"How Have You Changed?"

I've Changed

Over the last year I've changed a lot. I've gotten stronger mentally and more tattoos physically. A year ago I was in Camp, now I am back in the Hall.

People and faces change, but me I still have the same beliefs. Grown mature and smarter about my decision. My advice to everyone is change 'cause you want to, not 'cause people want you to. Much love to all out there.

-Creeper

From The Beat: If you feel you have gotten more mature and wiser on making your decision, than why are you back in the Hall? It that the change you wanted to make?

Change

People change every day, for the better or worse, but it's your choice to make.

I think I changed for the better because when I was on the outs, I always wanted to get bent and get blasted, but now I don't feel like doing any of that. That's why I changed for the best.

-Steven

From The Beat: Do you think being in a place that doesn't allow drugs helps you stay clean? Are you worried about getting out where there are more temptations? If you were released today, do you honestly think you could make it without using drugs? How?

Man, It's Time

Well, my situation is that I have to change my life around. On the one, I am about to have a baby and stuff so I can't run the streets anymore. I should have been thought about movin' on before my child though.

When I got shot in the 'jects, that's when I should have left, but money and my ninjas was still out there so I went back. But to all y'all, ya know Man, when ya touch down, don't just stand in front of the dirty sto' all day. Go to school or get a job — start makin' ya money the right way, ya dig?

RIP Ming-Lee, Hit Man, Kentay, Oddie Treals, Joe Cheese.

-Young T-Tader

From The Beat: We feel you — yeah, you should've changed before, but how are you going to take the opportunity to change that you have right now and make it count? How can you live by the wise words of advice you offer everyone else? When you get out, how are you going to start to change your life around?

Neva Change

I'll neva change. I'm still the young hustla.
Moms mad 'cause I'm thuggin' and playin' wit' dustas,
growin' up too fast, learnin' this street life quick.
I was only 11 or 12 when I first started it,
rocks under my tongue,
fallin' in love wit' this fast money,
bappin' knocks, makin' cash money,
thiz-a-lot, coppin' gold teeth to flash money,
I had to change my look
'cause the rollas know I'm a ninja that juk,
and the judge wanna throw me the book.
They made at the time I shook
I won't change 'cause I love how I get down.

-Thinzel Washington

From The Beat: We get this kind of piece often (much too often from you, Thinzel), and most of the time we just shrug our shoulders. But, to be real with you, when you write like this we want to cry, to scream, to shake you, slap you, pick you up and throw you against the wall, smack you across the head with a 2x4 just to wake you up. But you probably had plenty of this reaction already, which may explain your behavior. (Of course, we know none of that has anything to do with waking people up, but it might make us feel better.) We feel so powerfully that you could be a great leader, Thinzel, at a time when leadership at all levels is so lacking, and so desperately needed. Not everyone is blessed with your brain, so to see you dedicate it to such trivial pursuits makes us want to throw up our hands and just give up! The short-term pleasures you celebrate in this poem lead to nothing but long-term pain. You're either on a very short road (that ends in death), or a long one that ends as a slave wishing for things that are, by then, beyond his reach. Now is the time to grab those things, Thinzel (education, preparation for a stable future, and a dedication to your own greatest assets, your mind and soul), and not wait until it's too late to do anything about them.

Ain't Nothing Changed

Ain't nothing changed about me. I'm still that same ol' person. I still love hurtin' people, robbing people. Some people still think I have changed a lot, but really inside of me I haven't changed a bit.

I think I have a lot of evil inside my soul, and sometimes when I pray up to God and ask why do I act this way, I get no response. No love

-Ruthless

From The Beat: What is the response you're hoping to get from God, Ruthless? How do you think God talks to people? Could the fact that your in the hall be one way God speaks to you? When you ask yourself the same questions you put to God (why do you act the way you do), what answers can you come up with? Do you think you were born lovin' to hurt people? Were you born having "a lot of evil inside" your soul? If not, where did those things come from? And where do they lead?

GED

I've been trying hard to get my GED because when I get out I want some kind of diploma to show I finished school. When I got in I just had to do my math, so I've just been working hard so I know I can pass it and take some pressure off me when I'm out.

-Anthony

From The Beat: It was good to see how hard you were trying to do the math part of the GED. Keep putting all of your effort into doing it — we're confident you will pass. We wish you luck!

Breaking An Addiction

A year ago I was an addict I wouldn't come home and I was addicted to alcohol and cocaine. For at least a year, around Christmas last year, I decided to quit cocaine. Now I'm usually home at curfew, and I don't do cocaine. I barely ever drink, but I smoke a lot of marijuana though.

-Gobe Dimes

From The Beat: Congratulations, GD, on cleaning up your act. It is so important, especially at your age, to let your mind and body grow naturally, and not limit your future. Both cocaine and alcohol are highly addictive substances that the body craves after a while. The fact that you were able to give up one and nearly give up the other proves that you are a strong individual who can do whatever you set your mind to doing. Keep your eyes on the prize, and go for it.

Time For A Change

I have been running the streets for while now, stuck in the gang life not caring about nothing. That's how my mind was working. I even lost my best homie, my perro, (my dog) — RIP CL — to this game that never ends. But now I know. Now I understand. It's time for a change.

-Goofy

From The Beat: The game may never end, but as you make very clear, you can choose to stop playing it. We are interested in what it is that made you see the game differently? Besides losing your friend (which is tragic), what are the elements that led to your change of heart — or change of mind?

I Have Changed

How have I changed? I have changed so much from taking 30 — yes 30 — medications a day in a place where they diagnosed me with psychosis, ADHD, Bipolar and schizophrenia. I was in a mental hospital for four and one half months costing $400 a day. I did not graduate form that place. I failed that place. Let me tell you it cost $32,000, and I did not get to play hockey!

-The Hockey Man

From The Beat: If your family had to pay that much, at least they could have let you play hockey! We feel for you, Hockey Man, because these are a lot of burdens to carry around on your shoulders. If you had thirty meds then, how many are you down to now? Do you feel better now than you did then? Do you blame yourself for your illnesses? Would you blame yourself if you had pneumonia or cancer?

Forever Changing

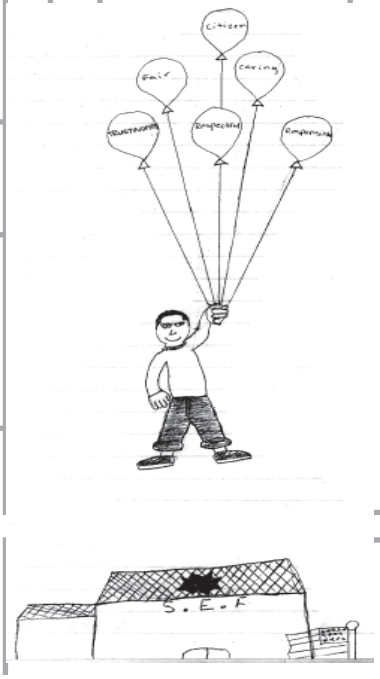
Last time I got locked up, I said, "I'm never comin' back" because I just didn't like it here, but now, here I am again, and it's because I didn't take anything out of the experience I'm getting out of today.

And I know it's gonna be hard, but I need to use what I learned to succeed and adapt. Don't make your time here for nothing, or you won't change.

-Big Heath

From The Beat: What do you need to get out of the experience of being locked up? Isn't the mere idea of being in a cell all day involuntarily enough to keep you out? Some of us know how hard it is while other pretend to know, but only you know what incarceration does to you. So, will there be other "last times," or is this it?

...around Christmas last year, I decided to quit cocaine.



"How Have You Changed?"

How Have You Changed?

I have changed in the last two days. I been locked up for something I had no part of and I just been thinking about how I can do better things with my life.

All my mom wants out of me is just don't do what my daddy did. I just want to live my life as all young men do. They want to see all young black men locked up or die in the streets. I have been in a lot of shhh that I will not want to go though.

I think I changed 'cause I'm in Juvenile with people I don't like, but I'm not going to do nothing 'cause I want to get out so I can have my freedom.

-Sheldon B2

From The Beat: Hmm . . . What is it that all young men want to do, and who are the "they" who want to see all young men locked up or dead on the streets? Yes, the system has been shown to be racist, but what are you doing to keep yourself from being a victim of it? It's great that you're not starting anything with the folks in the Hall you don't like, but are you staying away from the streets, are you keeping your game of legit so the system can't touch you? You need to take responsibility for what you do and who you are choosing to be.

How Did I Change?

I changed a lot by doing things that I did not do now that I am going to a school called Glen Mills. I'll get my GED so I can make my family happy. I learned how to play a new game called "cheat," but I think that when I come back I will not mess up.

-Lil' Kaazi B2

From The Beat: Good for you, Lil' Kaazi. We hope you will keep changing for the best.

I Changed A Lot

I changed a lot when I came in here because people have been talking to me about how important my life is, so when I get out, I am going to start going to school and stop hanging with the people that are getting me in here.

RIP Scharod.

-DeAndre B2

From The Beat: If you turn these words into action, you will be successful and free. Do it!

The Way I've Changed

The way I changed is when I came here I was like screw what people think about me, because I am the thug I am gon' be. Now I been here for a hot minute so I been thinkin' about what I been doin' here as long as I know I hold it down for my block.

-J-Stub B2

From The Beat: Well, we were thinking you had changed, but this piece makes us think your mentality hasn't changed much at all, and that's what's going to determine what your actions will be on the outs. We hope your mentality will improve at Glen Mills.

when I get out, I am going to start going to school

Change Is Here

Change is right, but what you do is wrong. But when you stay up, it seems like your friends want to mess that up.

-Shay GU

From The Beat: Sounds like you need new friends.

Now I'm Different

My attitude towards life changes
My thoughts about what should happen wit' myself changes
I act different
Talk different
Walk different
Look different
I get myself in different situations
Put myself through different times
Experiencing what others haven't experienced
Some bad, some good
But that's just the way it is
So you ask how I've changed
Or will I change
Like Tupac said
"Yeah, but it's clear I'll always be the same
Until the end of time"

-Bizzy B5

From The Beat: We appreciate what Tupac said, but it scares us a little because we know that "the end of time" came much too early for him, at least partly because he didn't change enough. Why do you think you talk, walk and act differently now than before, and can you describe some of those changes for us? What are the good changes you've made? What are the bad?

How Have You Changed

I really changed a lot because I used to care what other people thought. I was too busy trying to impress other people, like dressing better. Then I finally realized, what the hell am I doing trying to dress better for a whole bunch of dudes? So I was like, "I'm my own man. I don't need nobody to judge me."

-J-Money B1

From The Beat: How did you get so smart, J-Money? How did you realize people will have their own impressions of you, no matter how you try to influence how they think and feel about you, so it's pretty much useless to try? There is one person whose judgment you do need, and that is you! Since you've realized this, have you noticed changes deep inside? Like what?

Everything Has Value In Live

I think I've changed a lil' bit. I see how everything has value in life. Gettin' my freedom knocked off made me change. But I think I'll still be the same ol' love. I will never change, but I'll say this: I will change the way I live life, 'cause I only live once.

-Noriega B5

From The Beat: We're a little confused by your piece, Noriega. You seem to say you will both change and never change. How can you know, from where you sit now, that you will never change? We bet that ten years from now you'll look back on this time and say to yourself, "I hella changed, thank goodness..." We may be wrong, but check back with us in ten years...

Changes

Changes predict out whole life.
A lil' change on ya head could get ya killed.
A change in your moves could get ya smoked.
To never change ya ways when ya hustle can get you robbed.
To sum this up, changes could be good or bad.

-Diamond Pg B4

From The Beat: Your definition of change in this short piece is very limited. What about changing the way you look at life or the way you live life? Is that good or bad?

All my mom wants out of me is just don't do what my daddy did.

Everybody Goes Through Their Childish Age

Well, everybody goes through their childish age, like me. I was acting childish through my early teen years. I was not thinking, hanging with the wrong people and doing bad things. But now at the age of 15, I finally changed my attitude, the things that I do, and the people who I hang with.

The one big thing that changed me was being locked up. I learned that it was not worth it being in there.

First of all, lots of people think that they won't get caught, but then they end up doing something bad and that's on them. So that's how people change when they go through that stuff.

-Jonathon B1

From The Beat: Do you think most teenagers who mess up think they'll get away with whatever they're doing wrong, Jonathan? When you're on the outs, how will you resist doing whatever temptations come along again — because they will come?

World Life's Too Corrupted

I hate the word "change." I ain't really changed much, but I have made some differences in my life to make it a better one, and not get locked back up. I have matured to make decisions that will keep me away from incarceration. I want to attend City College and get certified in Business and Journalism.

I have changed from a year ago, 'cause I never thought 'bout college. All I ever wanted to do was ball out and push mo' weight than Pablo Escobar and Tony Montana. Just like my homie, Flea, a real lil' time mobstar, a real blockstar.

I think I could be that blockstar and give back with block love, and that's what I'ma do when I come home. I gotta game plan set, so have yours. The world is mine, 'cause life's corrupted where I'm at.

-Weasel B5

From The Beat: We've seen some of the changes (even if you don't like that word) in you, Weasel, and we're hoping for more. Like we've said before, sometimes it looks like you got one foot in the old world, and one foot in the new, and you're hoping to keep both feet moving. We think that will rip you up the middle, and that you have to make a real commitment to the change you hope to bring about. We know you've got it in you; we just don't know if you're down for it. We're holding our breath because the choices you make now will determine which foot you'll lift and move forward...

"Success Is . . ."

Success Starts With School

Success to me is when you succeed in life. What I am trying to say is, the only way you can make it in the world is if you go to college and get a good job and support your family. If you do not go to school, how can you be successful in life?

-Sean B1

From The Beat: We think you've found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow: education! Did you always know this go to school on the outs, or did you cut when you were in the mood? What do you want in life that school can help you with? What do you enjoy about school?

Getting In (School), Getting Out (The Hall)

My success is go on to the next grade, doing good in life by staying out of the Hall, getting off probation.

-Julius B1

From The Beat: Passing the grade you're in and going on to the next grade is an accomplishment, Julius. When will you be off probation? Will you start school again next fall? Where do you go to school? What do you enjoy the most in school? What do you want to learn next year? How else do you want to do well in your life?

What You Worked Hard For

Success is when you got thangs that you worked hard for, whether it's fast money or not. So, when you're just loungin' and kickin' it, that means you're successful. That's all I got to say right now.

-Young Fatz B5

From The Beat: This is certainly one definition of success, but you might want to consider the success that comes with expanding your mind through education. (We've seen your mind grow in the short time we've known you, so we know you're on the road to that success we're talkin' about.)

...the only way you can make it in the world is if you go to college and get a good job and support your family.

Different Meanings For Success

Success is like succeeding in one of your goals. That's not all I think success means--it mainly means having a career in life, that's what I think success means. But other people have different meanings for it.

-J-Money B1

From The Beat: You're right, J-Money, success means many things to people. What are your goals, and how will you achieve them? What do you want most for your life? How will you earn it?

Success Is...

When I get something done.
When I get something I always wanted and didn't stop 'til I did.
When I finally get shhh right.

-Noriega B5

From The Beat: Can you give The Beat Within examples of what you got done, how you earned something you wanted? And most important of all, what does it mean to get your "shhh right," and how do you know you did?

Two Chicks On The Side

Success is when you wake up wit' two chicks on the side in da master bedroom in your three-story mansion, ya na mean?

-Whiskey B5

From The Beat: If this is truly the definition of success, then we don't know anyone who's successful.

I Want To Have A Family And Go To Church

Success is a person who did good in school and now is going somewhere in life. When I get out of here I want to do good, and try harder in school, so when I grow up, I will get a good job and be intelligent. When I grow up I want to have a family and go to church.

-J-City B1

From The Beat: You're already very intelligent, J-City. But going back to school will help you by giving you more information about the world. What are you interested in learning? What have you already enjoyed learning in school? Are you reading while you're in Juvy? You don't have to wait to grow up to go to church, but we wish you huge success with a job, a family and with your church.

Start A Family With My Girl

I don't know what success is, but to me, success is when I get out. I'm going to change my life into a being a good person, so I can get off probation and do whatever I want. After that, that's my success for now, but when I grow up, I want a job and start a family with my girl, so I can have a better life than being locked up in jail.

-B B1

From The Beat: Sounds all good, BTG. But being a good person is not something you have to wait to get out for. What kind of a job would you like to have? Where would you like to live? Do you hope to have kids some day? What would you teach your kids that you wish you had known now?

The Word Success

Success is a word that describes me. It shows me and all the goals that I have accomplished in life. I know that somewhere down the line my success can be someone's downfall.

I know that my life is real. I plan to succeed in everything that matters to me. Success is my life story. I have succeeded even though I am locked up I have succeeded. I have freed my mind and being able to bring myself at ease with one of my biggest struggles, myself.

Success is also in a positive environment. Success is knowing that even the little things are major parts in life — to hear the birds chirp, to see a flower sprouting. Success is not only external, but also internal.

-Yang Threadz B4

From The Beat: Seems like you know pretty well what success means, and it looks like you are a walking success. If you trip along that walk, just get up, dust yourself off,

Success is knowing that even the little things are major parts in life — to hear the birds chirp, to see a flower sprouting.

Success is

Living your life day by day is a success. Change is a success. Reaching your destiny is a success. Being a hawg is a success. Hitting the blunt and let your mind free is a success. Reaching your goal is a success. Living life in peace is a success, The world is success. It depends on what mind state you have because anything can be a success.

To all, stay up and be strong. Don't let em hold you down. Do yo' thang. One love.

-Young Sochie B4

From The Beat: Yes, you are right, success is defined differently by different people, but you've given us a definition which means everything is a success. How do you know when you've reached your destiny? What goal do you want to reach so that you can measure if you're successful or not? How is the world a success when there's so much war, disease, killing, poverty? Don't we all live our lives day by day? Are we all successes? Are you a success? Why or why not?



"Success Is . . ."

Success Is When ...

Success is when yo' pockets get fat
Success is when you can make money
Without having to carry a gat
Success is when you put yo' block on the map
Success is when you stop selling crack
Success is when you scrape a ninja
By hitting him in the face and not in the back
Success is when you get in a dice game and smack
Success is when you roll past dressed in all black
Success is when your dreads bang to yo' back
Success is when you're living life like a boss fo' a fact
Success is when you're on the right track
Success is when you give away everything you got
And then you make it right back
Success is when you can get any female
With yo' mouthpiece 'cause they love that
Success is when you're from a hot block
You can leave and always come back
I'll holla back

-Darryl

From The Beat: You're so deep in the mess, you pull one foot out — and you think that's the best anyone can do. But you need to look out, 'cause you will get pulled down by that other shoe! So much of what you call success is just a step away from your next court case — so why call it success when it's only for a day? We call it setting yourself up to fall, okay? Rise above the street when you leave the Hall — and leave it forever! Now that spells SUCCESS in capital letters!

Successful Rapper!

In a few years, I will be a famous rapper. Remember my face! 'Cause you gon' see it on a magazine — XXL, Source, Dubb, Vibe, or something. Believe that!

Because I believe I deserve it! All my family that have passed, I have to make it for them — and for my sisters and my brothers, so we can live the way we always wanted to! Be successful!

What I've been through, any other man would have broken down by now like a bucket you had for years. One of the things that is strengthening me to become rich, is the family I have that is and always has been — treating me bad! But it strengthens me because I want to do them bad! But how can I do them bad with nothing they want?

The others, are because moms and pops died, my two brothers and one sister are the only ones I have to depend on — we all depend on each other. We have other brothers and sisters, but us four shared the same struggles. So I'm going to make sure us four live righteous! In a Miami villa!

Me and my squad gon' get rich together. You'll hear about us every day! What go-gettas!

-Lil' Clark

From The Beat: Before you give it all up for a villa in Miami, just get your education, a high school degree and a j-o-b. A roof over the heads of you, your brothers and sister, will make a house full of love mean more than millionaire's vista from a house on a hill. Just stay out of jail and pay your bills. Then, if your lyrical skills put you on the map; well, then — go on! And be all that!

Success In My Eyes

... is when you have what you need
I have found a way to be successful
but I am missing one thing
so I am not quite there yet
I want to say what's up to all my Oakland folks

-Josh

From The Beat: Do right, keep faith — and you'll find that last piece of the puzzle on your way.

Success

To me, success is when you have achieved your life long dream of becoming something or someone. Success is when you finally got that high school diploma or when you finally got to be a lawyer, a successful lawyer not just a regular lawyer.

Or when you first sold your own bundle — that's success. Also success is when you beat your case, or when you wanted to get at that thick Puerto Rican girl — that's success, that's what I think success is to me. What about you?

-Lil' Carlos

From The Beat: Do you think being a successful lawyer and selling your first bundle are the same kind of success? You give different examples of success, some more positive than others. What are your goals for success?

Success Is Having

Success is someone who has something going for himself without someone else hating or stopping you from doing your thang.

Success is having what you always wanted. Like it says in the Bible, when I was a child, I behaved as a child. I spoke as a child. But when I became a young man, I put away my childish things. Now that's when I became successful — when I started being a man!

So I reap what I sow. But right now I'm trying to stay successful in life. So y'all ninjas that tryin' to stop "mines" — I give y'all my middle finger, 'cause y'all ain't nothing but jealousy and envy.

-Lil' Rob

From The Beat: You keep going back to a game that is full of hate, jealousy, envy, snitching, robbing, shooting and killing. No success in that game can last for long. If you want to be a successful man, you need to change your plan. Sow with toil; reap with joy.

"The Camera's Your Destiny"

San Francisco County

Videotaping My Life

If the judge gave me a chance to film six hours of my day, I would tape sports, me playing with my family and anything else that would help me get out. I would tape my family going out to play, and at home, cooking.

-Sean B1

From The Beat: What do you do in your life on the outs that's special to you, that would impress the judge enough for him to give you the best determination he could? Do you work hard in school? Help your parents out with chores? Try to understand your family when they're tired, overworked, frustrated? All those things would not only show the judge what freedom means to you, but what responsibility means, too, and that's what the judge wants to hear (or see).

Camera Eye

I would first go to my house, record my folks, because they mean so much to me. Then I'll go to a Pupuseria and get me some pupusas. Just by me going there gives me the feeling of freedom. Then I'll walk around my neighborhood, to know what my freedom is, period.

-Noriega B5

From The Beat: How will you show, through your video, that you have learned some things about the responsibility that goes with freedom? Have you? What are the responsibilities you think a judge wants to hear about, and how would you show them? (Do you think freedom means the right to do anything we want, or are there limits to freedom? What are they?)

Six Hours Of Freedom

I would buy my whole fam gifts. I would thank God. I would go home, take a three-hour bath with my girl, enjoy tha nick an' nacks of her body while I have time. I would remove her from the tub an' make passionate love to her fa days. When I'm done with that I would go an' thank my family fa sticking by me. Then I would leave an' return an' hope the judge understands.

-Diamond Pg B4

From The Beat: Even we do not understand or can't understand how this is supposed to make a judge feel your freedom. (You couldn't make love to your girl for days if you're only out for hours...). We imagine the judge looking at your video, then peering down at you from the bench to say two words: "Grow up."

The People Affected By Me Being Locked Down

If I got a chance at freedom for six hours, to show what freedom means to me, first I would take the camera with me to my household to show all the people who were affected by me being locked down. Ask my sister how she was affected, then my two little brothers. Then my parents will get a chance to speak on camera, on my behalf. Then all the rest of my family who are close to me.

I would do this to show the judge that freedom means something to more people than just me. Then I'm going to the board of education with the camera, to try to get into a school, if the judge does let me out. Then I'm dipping into my stash, and me and my boo going to the Embassy, because all that other stuff don't mean that the judge is going to let me out.

-No Name B5

From The Beat: We guess you plan to leave the video camera at home when you dip into your stash and take your girl to the Embassy. But doesn't that undercut whatever you might have put on that tape? If you've already decided ahead of time that there's nothing you can do to make the judge let you out, then why even try? Does freedom — even six hours of it — carry any responsibilities with it? How would you show the judge what they are?

...I would take the camera with me to my household

Seeing My Family

I want to go home to see my family, and never want to come back here. The way to get out of here is to do the time that the judge gives me. The way not to get in here is to think before you act.

People say they are going to change but they don't. They just say to give you some advice, but they don't do it theirselves.

-Maurice B1

From The Beat: What you write is often true, Maurice. People often don't take their own best advice. You seem to be taking responsibility for whatever brought you into Juvy, and that's a great start. Doing the time the judge gave you is wonderful advice for yourself. What plans do you have for your life, once you're free again? How will you achieve them? Great luck to you!

You Can Do It Too

What's up? This is Crazy Legs, up in the Hall waiting for the EM people to take me home.

I would like to tell all at Camp that I said what's up! And do your program — I did it, you can do it, too! It is hella easy. This is your boy, Santana. I will holla back.

-Crazy Legs

From The Beat: Now that's homie love, to show the right way out of this system. Don't mess up on EM now, just do it.

The Streets

I live on the streets.
My family is from the streets.
I sell cream on the streets
And if you ain't got no pistol, you can't be on the block.
I be there serving hella knocks.
I can't wait till I get back to the streets.
I'm gonna be all about my money.
The streets are rough.
Don't be out there or you will get caught up.
Holla and I'm out.

-Lil' Suave

From The Beat: So you're gonna go back out there and do the same shhh? Sell cream and get money the illegal way? What do you see in your future?

It's A Wrap For 'Em

What's in the makin' The Beat? This Lil' Kev. Well, I ain't gonna be hella bootsy with it. I'm just going to say if I saw victim that I was locked up for — you might as well say I'm a follower 'cause this boy got three words: "It's a wrap" brotha!

And, I don't got nothing else to say, brotha. Alright y'all.

-Lil' Kev

From The Beat: If you take responsibility for your actions and stop blaming other people then maybe you will be on the road to freedom. Get some control of your thoughts and freedom!

Why Ninjas Hate

What's up, Beat? It's Maurice — the one who wrote, "Damn, Who Would Want to Kill A Fifteen Year Old!"

Y'all wrote back and said, "Has your friend's death taught you anything, or did he die in vain?" And, "What makes folks go around killing each other?"

The money and drugs are all in our city, and some people eat off drug sales — and some people get themselves killed off drug sales! And that's only one reason.

The next reason, is 'cause it's two thousand and four, and ninjas ain't fightin' no more! And if you whoop a ninja, they can't take it — it hurts their rep'! So they go get a gun and kill you! That's the second reason.

And the third reason is, if you take a girl away from somebody else.

-Maurice

From The Beat: Maybe you did have to sell drugs to eat, and maybe when you were a little youngster there was no other way you could think of to make your pay. But that's not true for you anymore, is it? So, why risk your life selling drugs? You know, we're not blaming your friend for getting killed. The streets are crazy! Why do you stay selling on the street in this day and age?

Boxing

I would show the judge what I do on my free time. I would go to the boxing gym and show him how I get down, how I beat ass in the boxing ring.

I would tell the camera that I want to start boxing because I would beat the shhh out of Tyson and Roy Jones Jr.

-P-Daddy

From The Beat: What do you think the judge would say after he sees you get down in the ring?

To My Homeboy

What's crackin' homie? How you doing here? I know it's your first time, but don't trip — you gonna be coo'. Just don't let no one get you down, and don't let no one disrespect our 'hood.

Man, you hella stupid for gettin' caught up — but I ain't got no room to talk, because I came in here for some stupid shhh! I never thought you would hit the Hall, but I also thought that about myself. And look at me, I know this place like the back of my hand.

Hopefully, you get out soon since it's your first time. Just remember, we need to stick together and be strong. Because I don't let none of this shhh get to me.

I stay solid, on my toes, with my head up, no matter where they send me — whether it be the Y or back to Camp, I remain the same. You can take away my freedom, but you can't take away my pride!

-Young Gato

From The Beat: You're just shooting him the party line, and look where it got you! Here for the seventh time, talking about how you'll keep your head up at the Y. Now you know we don't want to bring you down, but if you have love for Ruben, don't invite him to get clowned by the system like you. Tell him about when you could have made your first time here, your last time. If you're his friend, humble yourself a little and tell him how important it is get clear of trouble now, his first time here.

On My Way To The "CYA"

Well I'll be on my way, I just go da news.

Yep the "Y" I go, so I ain't mad. Ninjas want me to go all out, but dat ain't me. I did what I did so now I got to do what I do, ya' understand this?

So I got a year, but they told me that I'll do six, and do six on parole. Please believe that when I touch down, it's over, ya' understand this?.

I am going all out, when I am out. That's how you do it. Don't go dumb before you out, 'cause then, that's a set up fo' more time, ya understand this?

They want us locked up. Just hold off and go dumb when you free, feel me? And most cold part is that I ain't stressing, I ain't mad. Ya understand this?

-Bandits

From The Beat: Good, Bandits, don't be mad. That will just make your time that much harder. We understand. Think positive, just keep your mind on getting out. What do you mean by going dumb? Was it getting dumb that got you sent to the "Y"? Lastly, how can you lace yourself with some life skills like learning a trade or learning to type so when you're free again, you'll have some new skills under your belt?

Dear Beat

Thanks for you feedback on my writings. Your comments help me when I feel lost in my head, lost in my life here. They help me think of my problems in a different way.

-Brent

From The Beat: Thank you, Brent, for thanking us. We feel you thinking in your writings, and we feel you feeling, especially in your poems. Keep on growing, keep on going.

In The Hall For My 17th B-day

Aye, what's up? This that Hayward soldier on my b-day wishin' I was at home with family and folks, or at least up at Camp for my b-day. But it's coo' 'cause I put myself in this position.

Otherwise what's up, one luv!

-Lil' Rickie

From The Beat: Happy belated 17th Birthday Leo! How can you make it so that you are free for your 18th birthday? How can you make sure that you don't put yourself in messed up predicaments?

You Can't Do That Where I'm From

See ya folks and don't holla
Not give ya younger brother a dolla
Buy a scraper without puttin' it on rims wit' some suction
Stock radio no fifteen's bumpin'
Ride it Saturday night not stuntin'
Naw you can't do that where I'm from

-Emmy-boe

From The Beat: Man, with all your talent, where's the challenge come? How 'bout write thirty lines without a single scandalous one. These few lines give a taste of what you can do, but for every line here, we had to cut two. You're glorifying violence, drugs, crime — when that's exactly what has you here doing time! The way you tell it, where you come from, everybody's got to reserve a spot in the system — why not spit some wisdom?

What Hurt

I'm going to a group home for six months that my friend went to.
That hurt to hear my ninjas die
That hurt to hear Da Da got shot
That hurt to see my cousin shot
That hurt to see my grandma die
That hurt to be in jail fo' Jay-Jay's funeral
That hurt to be locked up
That hurt when my patna went down for that
That hurt.
Man that's messed up how Lil' Tomis got shot and killed
That hurt
This real
It hurt.
Rest in peace Jay-Jay and ANT and Mikey and B-Bo and Critey-Bo and Charley-Mac and Greedy. It don't stop Roney-Bo. From,

-Lil' Dirt

From The Beat: It's unfortunate that so many of your patnas passed away. Did you learn anything from their deaths or have they died in vain? How can you save yourself from a similar tragedy?

In My Jets

It's me from Fillmore in San Francisco.
Where the jets will make you get low
And we run around takin' people's dough
I'm tell in you bro it's no love in my concrete jungle
Where youngstas as young as eight is holdin' a bundle
And if it ain't a bundle than it's probably a chop
'Cause it's too easy to get took out when you live on my block
Where you must carry glocks
And if not you get shot in the back
'Cause just too bad when a soul is lost for a stack

-Swiss

From The Beat: Sounds scary. Is all the violence necessary? Do you always want to be living in the 'hood carrying a glock and a bundle? How long do you think this will last before it crumbles? Do you really have to carry a glock? Aren't there some law-abiding citizens on your block?

Help

they got me
locked up
they won't
let me out

-Lil' Dayday

From The Beat: You walk into a wall; then you act like it, hit you!

Premeditated Death Wish

I can't lie
Every other night I watch me die
Visualize it in my dreams
Gettin' hit with hollow tips
And in a distant, hearin' my faint screams
Wakin' up in hospital lookin' at the light beams
Listenin' to the doctor
Tellin' my grandmother I'm not gonna make it
But I knew deep down inside
I know I'm gonna have to face it
Most likely it will be premeditated.

-Lil' Rickie

From The Beat: Do you think that you'll always have a death wish? What do you need so that you'll be more optimistic about your life and what it holds for you? How can you make your future better than your past?

Done Too Many Drugs

Man, I put this on everything — I think I done smoked too much weed and popped too many thizzles!

'Cause it's like now, when we watch a movie, I don't know what the hell is going on! And we watched "Harry Potter" — and me and my homie, did not know what the hell was going on! We was hella lost!

And half the time durin' the day, I don't know what is going on at all! But when I get out, I'm still going to smoke and pop me some pills.

-Young Smokey

From The Beat: Is this supposed to be funny? It isn't. You are disoriented because you're detoxing. Forget the sign on the hill for a minute and look at the signs in your own mind — it is time to stop! Don't fear to let the smoke clear. It's the only way you'll stay out of here.

I'm Locked Up, They Won't Let Me Out

Seems like the harder I try
The harder it get
First five-oh got a lock
On my wrist
An' now I'm askin' to piss
An' I can't even shhh
'Cause the staff be actin' like this
An' they always ask me why
I get to flashin' and shhh
'Cause I'm tired of this shhh
An' then we locked up
An' lookin' fo' the hook up
Just to pass time
We write
An' do push-ups
But then I look up
An' notice it's a God
But I got a reputation
An' best believe
It ain't
Fo' trickin' an' hatin'
An' no perpetratin'
But if I get on my knees
With the time to pray
Just wishin'
I could smell that air
An' get through these days
Of bein' locked up in here

-Dayday, Theo, and Young Dee

From The Beat: The harder you try at what? The harder you try to do right in your life, or the harder you try to shine on the grind? If you get on your knees, quit chasing fame and get a j-o-b, you won't have to feel this pain ever again, young men! Amen.

Hall Stress

Don't let this Hall shhh fool you! Still sitting in the dark, waiting for the sun to shine. Even though I know I'm getting out, I'm still stressing.

And my cousin sayin' I snitched on him, when I know he testified against me! He know I did not snitch. And now we both stuck — only difference is: He is going to the Y, and I am going to Camp.

See, everything that happened went all wrong. And now me and him dumbstruck! Missing the family. Stay safe. And never doubt me again.

-The Gypsy

From The Beat: The life you've been living will always lead you in the end to this: "See, everything that happened went all wrong." You need to know that's the way it will always go sooner or later, if you continue to live the life of gangbanger. Find a better way to make your pay — you and your boy, both!

What's Up

What's up to all that's locked up here at the Hall.

I can't wait to get up there at Camp! You holdin' it down up there at Camp! I'm doin' my program, and I hope all you are doin' your program, too. We shouldn't all be locked up in here — we should be home with our familias and in our 'hoods and on the block, postin' up with our hainas.

It's not coo' to be locked up and be away from our familias. So to all — do your program and be coo' so we can get out and be with our familias! All right then, stay up! This is Young Scooby signing out.

-Young Scooby

From The Beat: It'd be great if you all did good programs, but the program doesn't end at the gate when you're at Camp. Those that play it like that, keep coming back, till they don't get to go home for way too long. Stay clean. Stay strong.

Goin' To The "Y"

What's up, Beat? I got some bad news. I'm goin' to the "Y." That move is messed up 'cause the DA wants me to get two strikes and do two to three years at the "Y."

I go to court on Friday the 13th. I just hope things change and I don't get two strikes. Well, I just wanted to say that when I go to the "Y," I'll keep in touch with y'all. I'm out.

-Lil' Carlos

From The Beat: How can you make the best of your time at the Y? Can you learn a trade(s) so that you will have some new skills under your belt when you get out? Learn something. Let the time serve you.

Another What's Up?!

What's up homeboys this is the homeboy, Green Eyes . Just sayin' what's up and shhh! Feel me?

Well I'm still waiting on a punk ass group home to come interview me. They playin' me! But I ain't trippin'. I should be out by the end of this month! I got to do 6 months but I don't know where yet! But my PO told me it was gonna be close this time because all the other one's were hella far and I ran!

And also what's up to all stay up and be cool. One love and respect!

-Green Eyes

From The Beat: You walk in to a wall, and you act like it — hit you! Why do you run from group homes? Try and stay where you're going so you can get out and stay out for good. Six months will fly by quick.

Birthday Shout Out

What up, Beat? This is Little Gato. I'm writing this two weeks in advance because that's how long it takes for a piece to hit print in The Beat.

So, by the time anyone reads this — my birthday was the twentieth of August. And also I just want to say, "Happy birthday," to Augie.

-Lil' Gato

From The Beat: The love gets twisted when your only wish is for a homeboy to keep bangin'. And we wonder if homie love will keep hangin' when a homeboy decides to quit a life of sin. We're not putting words in anyone's mouth, except our own: Happy Birthday to you and Augie, both!

Pimpin', You Owe Me (Part II)

Getting paper day after day
Bringing in money without a word to say
Paying yo' bills
Making yo' pockets get phat
Buying you clothes to put on yo' back
Staying open like 7-11
Because of you, I caught that case
Pimpin', you owe me everything and above
More than champagne and bottles of Dove.
(To be continued....

-Fireball

From The Beat: Pimpin' owes you. But more than that — you owe yourself. You've given so much to this horrible game. But, what now? Stop giving to it! Your not going to get anything back from it! You know what comes from this game, is this what you want? You are a strong young lady. We've followed your life, your experiences, everything you wrote down you shared with us. You are such a smart girl. You deserve better. We know it's hard to turn your back on a lifestyle that you've known for so long. But just imagine how great it will feel to walk towards something else, something new, without looking back.

The System Got Us Trapped

We some victims of the system
And they got us trapped
Black man's in a cell
Stressing like hell
Make me want a sack
Mad 'cause I need a phone call
Staff got us messed up
So now we beating on the wall
Yellin' out our turf
And our roommates say shut up
And then they get beat up
Now ninja got a problem with us
Man the system got us messed up

-Theo, Dayday, and Young Dee

From The Beat: You take a bad situation and make it worse, drive yourself crazy and double your curse. You're not going to change the system, but you need to listen to yourself — 'cause inside and out, you're getting clowned taking this route.

Family An' Friends, My Film

If I had to show the judge a six-hour film to be free, I would show him what I do with my family — how we just get together and enjoy each other's presence.

I would show him all my patnas and how much love we got for each other. I would also show him all my females — and I would have them all say a little memo about why I shouldn't be put in jail.

-Howard

From The Beat: It sounds like there's a lot of love for you out there in the free world. But now are your patnas good character references? You want to square up, but do they?

Staying open like 7-11
Because of you, I caught that 187

To All

What's up? This the Negro just kickin' back.

Well, I'm just kickin' back waitin' to go to the pen. And do my time. I took a deal for seven years and have to do 85%, so that's six years. Just want to say what's up.

-Negro

From The Beat: What do you think about going to the pen? You think you gonna get yo' mind right or are you gonna get deeper in the game? Are you gonna educate yourself?

Welcome Me Back

What's up Beat? It's me again, back at cha.

Yup, I came back and I'm hella mad, but I really ain't in the mood to write tonight. I just wanted to give a shout out to The Beat and everybody who puts their time into writing things for The Beat.

But I'ma holla at y'all later and tell y'all more about what's going on with me — Fireball and the game.

-Fireball

From The Beat: What's up Fireball? We've been worried about you. Why are you mad? – Okay, we'll wait till you're ready to share. It's nice to know that you're safe, even though you are back in the Hall.

I just wanted to give a shout out to The Beat and everybody who puts their time into writing things for The Beat.

I Have No Friends

The same ninjas you do dirt fo'
Will turn they back on you
For a pigeon
It ain't much love as you see
The same ninjas you mess wit'
Won't bring slugs where you sleep
I have family

-Lil' Nef

From The Beat: You have family, but no friends. What do you think constitutes a good friend? What qualities do you want in a friend? Loyalty? Support? Have you ever turned your back on a friend? Maybe those people aren't friends. Why do you think people do this?

Rap Music

I believe that rap music influences "young" people's life.

I think that the words that they say degrade women and sometimes make them have low self-esteem to the point that they believe that's how they are.

I think sometimes it doesn't, though, because if the beat is off the hook, then you want to listen to it regardless.

-Brittani

From The Beat: Do you think that the lyrics influence our society more, or is it our society that is influencing rap music? We think that we can all agree that there is a problem with degrading women. How do we stop our society from acting this way? Is there a way to show all these folks that this is not okay? Do you think censorship is the answer? Or is there a smarter way to solve this problem?

How Have I Changed?

I came to Juvenile Hall last year for a dope case. I was locked up for two and a half months. Then, I got sent off to my group home in San Francisco.

I stayed there for one year. It was okay I just wanted to mess some of them females up sometimes because I could not always have it my way, but I had to think, "If I wanted to go back home, I had to do what I had to do." That was finishing my program.

When I got out, I said, "Screw it, I don't want to sell dope no more if I have to go through that crap."

-Yana-Bo

From The Beat: Good thinking. We always pay the consequences for our actions. Sometimes we get to benefit from them too. What plans do you have for your future?

Hillcrest

Soon I Will Be Home

Fifteen more days until I get my first home pass
Three hours, but the time will change through the weeks
I'm so excited
I can't stop thinking about it
From my first home pass on
Time will go by fast
Soon I will be home
Where I belong
With my family and friends
Who have been supporting me
Through thick and thin
I love them for that
And I appreciate what they have done for me
No matter what
Nobody's going to take that from me.

-Tiny

From The Beat: Nobody can take your family from you but you, so learn how to cherish that little time you have with them from your home pass. How can you use this time — however short — to lay the foundation for returning to your family, your friends, and your community?

Wildflower

I am a wildflower
wild yet beautiful
beautiful yet wild
but I am not able
to grow without
sun without air
without life.
I am being punished
just 'cause I'm wild
I need to be in my
natural habitat but
I'm being stopped
for being myself
for being wild.

-Peewizzle

From The Beat: Is your wildness of a different sort than that of the wildflower? Does your wildness infringe on the ability of others around you to have the sun, air, and life that they need as well? How can you continue to be who you are without stepping on the toes of who others are?

If I Had Six Hours

If I had six hours to film something for the judge for my freedom, I would film all them firme jainas, churches, Redwood City streets, family dinner, and myself with my lady. That's freedom with a twelve pack of Tecate in the 'hood. Well I'm out.

-Creepy

From The Beat: It is sad to see that even small topic like this, you can't take it seriously because no matter where you go, you will be put in this position. In YA you'll go in front of a review board, and they'll want to hear what freedom means to you — if you answer like this, you won't see it anytime soon. So please, take your time and think it through next time.

Lamei AKA Clumsey

L uscious lips
A lways fitted
M aking money
E nvied by some . . .
I rresistible to ninjas
A nd well
K nown
A s
C lumsey
L oves to get it
U nder your shhh
M an, don't hate
S tay ready
E ven when you think you ain't
Y ou know what it do

Much love and respect to the fellas that get money and ain't playin', feel me? Keep doing what you do baby boyz.

-Lamei

From The Beat: And we give much respect to those who are ale to make money in a way that's legit and doesn't run their life. It's amazing, and confusing, to read your pieces each week, Lamei — you go back and forth between investigating your hurt and the causes of it, and pieces like this in which you put the mask back on.

Success

My success
Is achieving
My dreams
My success
Is reaching the starts,
But I have to grow up
And stop jumpin' my cars
Success is me.

-Friskie

From The Beat: What stars are you reaching for? What are the dreams you're nurturing?

Sir Ken The Great And Prince Charming

Sir Ken: What up, pimpin'?
Prince Charming: Shhh man, just trying to make a dolla out of fifteen bricks.
Sir: Yeah dog, I know what cha mean.
Prince: So what you think gon' happen when you get out?
Sir: I don't even know. I might just chill on tha block and do my thang, ya know.
Prince: Yeah, I know. You gotta do what you gotta do to survive, ya heard?
Sir: Shhh man, what chu trying do when you get out?
Prince: You know I gots to make that money. Like I said, you gotta do what you gotta to do to survive.

-Prince Charming

From The Beat: We're going to single in on one statement here — that you need to make that money to survive. How much do you think you need to make to survive? Is survival getting enough so that you're fed, so that you help keep a roof over your head, so that you've got the materials for school? Or is survival pimpin' in a ride, rockin' the latest $200 pair of shoes, flossin' for the world to see? We'd love to see you drop a piece on the meaning of survival, Prince.

Weekly Writings

When?

Wha's up, Beat? This is Indio still stuck up in the halls waiting to get sentenced to CYA. I'm anxious to go because as a kid I always knew I was gonna end up in there. I made some bad choices in life and now I have to serve my time and sav it out. Like they say, "Open my door 'cause the battle fields calling my name."

Stay up and help one another. One love, one way.

-Indio

From The Beat: We think some of your "I-don't-give-a-shhh" attitude is going to be checked when the reality of the Y hits you — and the reality of what lies beyond the Y. You may have thought you'd "end up" in the Y when you were a kid (which, itself, is a tragedy), but that's not where you'll end up. They've got far worse places than the Y, and you're practically announcing that you're eager to end up there. (How 'bout the Pelican Bay or Corcoran SHU? More than 23 hours a day in solitary confinement. Are you ready for that?) We like you, Indio, and we know you have potential to be much more than the system's slave that you seem happy to allow yourself to be, so all we can do is hope that someone will cross your path who says or does something to open your eyes. In the meantime, all we can do is hope for the best...

Can't Wait To Get Out

I can't wait to get out of this place. It will be the happiest day in my life because it will be 11 months that I've been locked up. It sucks so much because I miss when my brother. He got out of the pen and my mom went to pick him up.

That suck because I told my brother that I will be there to pick him up but I was in camp. That suck so much. And I wasn't there to go see my aunt baby. I got so much haters on my side, like that 50 cent song, "Many men wish death upon me," and that's how I live in my life.

To all out there, much respect.

-Shrek One

From The Beat: Those things you missed while you were locked up — your brother's freedom, your cousin's birth — those are the things that define what it means to be in prison. And you're right, it sucks big time. So, with freedom just around the corner, Shrek, we hope you can remember just how much you hated it, so you don't risk losing it again.

My Last Week

This is going to be my last week. I'm getting out on the 20th of this month. I will be going to a group home in San Jose for two years. I don't know how I'm going to like it, since I've been in a group home for four years. But it's time to go. I will continue in The Beat Without.

-Aaron

From The Beat: We hope you keep that promise to write us from your new group home, Aaron. Good luck.

Dad

When I do wrong
You're always there
To help me pick up
The pieces of my mess
When I do right
You're always there
To give me love for doing good
Dad, you're my biggest
Fan and I love you
Thank you for everything.

-Sad Girl

From The Beat: Wow — this is a touching tribute to your father. What it is about your father that keeps him by your side, through good and bad? Is there a way to learn from him what it takes to be a good parent, so that if you have children of your own someday you'll follow the example that he set?

My Family

If I had six hours to show what freedom means to me, I would go home and show my family.

-Megan

From The Beat: What would you show about your family? We want more . . .

Family Love

I think the love of my family is the only thing that keeps me sane in here.

Looking at these four white walls I pretend they're a screen, and I watch old memories dance across my walls.

Family love is the only thing that keeps me sane.

-Sad Girl

From The Beat: What are the memories that play themselves out on your walls? Once you return to your family, what will it take to make sure you stay on the outs with them?

A Blink

With a blink of an eye
My freedom was taken from me
As I sit and reminisce
Tears roll down my face 'cause I'm wishin' I was free

Thinkin' about the mistakes I've made
Wishin' I can turn back the hands of time an' do it all over again
But the outcome always turns out the same
People in the system can't win

The life I'm forced to live
Or should I say the life I lead
Is straight materialistic an' my goals are fueled by greed
My PO's on my back
No matter how I try an' fight
It's really plan an' simple
Ain't nothin' I do is eva right.

-Shortay

From The Beat: Nothing? Please — there may be some things you do that aren't right, but we're not willing to believe that nothing you do is ever right. You're right when you change your delivery from talking about the life you're forced to lead to the life that you choose to lead. Why do you choose to live a life fueled by greed and materialism? Is there a way to bring your materialism and greed into line with what's legal? It's not a crime to be materialistic or greedy (it may be unethical, but it's not criminal), but it seems that they've taken you too far. If you could turn back the hands of time, what would you choose to do again? What can you choose to do differently in the future? It's not about your PO, it's about you.

I Can Live Without Haters

I got three months up here, and I been locked up for eight months. I'll get out on Nov 1, and live my life — be with my family and my big brother, and go see who in the 'hood.

When I get out, I'm going to start my life over, or move out of South San Francisco and go back to Fresno and go live with my big brother Oger. Just chill, live my life to the fullest, kick it on the spot and do what I do is all that I got in my life.

I still have hater on my side but I don't give a damn about them. They want to see Shrek to go down. I got three months in this place, and I can't wait to get out.

Much love and respect to all.

-Shrek One

From The Beat: We're pulling for you when you get out of here, Shrek, but so much is up to you. If you let the haters get to you, then they can succeed in bring you down. If there's a way to avoid that whole scene and not have to face the funk, we encourage you to take it. It doesn't matter what "they" say about you. It only matters what you say about you — and the choices you make for your own future, not theirs. Think hard about what you want out of life, and don't do the things that put those goals in jeopardy.

I'm Not Coming Back

I think freedom is bigger than life because it takes you where you want to go. Juvenile hall is going to change ma life for sure. I will change for my familia. I promise I will not come back to Juvenile Hall.

-Jaime

From The Beat: If you know what led you here, then you know how to stay out of here. Knowing is not the same as doing, though, so your actions will speak louder than your words. Is this your first time in the Hall, Jaime. We ask that question only because we've heard that promise many times before from many young people. Sometimes they stay out; sometimes they don't. Our advice is this: Don't come back (but if you do, get out and don't come back...)

Males

Males, to me, are funny. They will say anything to get down into your pants. Why do males play so much? They don't understand that they might be hurting us, but they don't care as long as they get some. Then, they find someone they want to be with and love.

For the girls, they ain't gonna be played again, so they have this shell around them that no one can get though, and males wonder why they can't get through the shell. But one day, maybe some male will understand, but I doubt it.

-Megan

From The Beat: Unfortunately, there seems to be a lot of truth in what you say — from what we see, many males only seem to be interested in sex, ignoring any other aspects of healthy relationships, and girls do seem to harden themselves as a means of protection. What do you think it would take for a man to understand how you feel? What would it take to break through your shell?

When I dream now I dream 'bout bein' in here!

My Dreams

When I first got in here
I used to dream
'bout me bein' on the outs!
When I dream now
I dream 'bout bein' in here!
I've been here for almost three months,
and already I dream
'bout bein' here!
So to me it seems
like this is my permanent environment.
I can't wait
till I go home
and start dreamin'
'bout bein' out there
and not in here!

-Denise

From The Beat: Jail can do that to you mentally — that's one of the reasons why we encourage you to write whatever's on your mind down on paper. Just look at it as another way to relieve all the stress you have mentally and physically, and to use your imagination and free your mind. We hope that sweeter dreams are in your future.

In This Game

In this game, it's one way in and one way out.
Initiation and death, that's something to thank about.
In this game, you must have clout
and the ability to carry messages and orders about.
This game is getting treacherous,
so watch yo' chest
'cause we might snatch yo' necklace.
I'm just a thug trying to get them pesos.
I got major game and those boots, I'm about to lace those, and if you didn't get that, you must be real slow.

-Suga Shane

From The Beat: It's easy to do what you've been doing week in and week out. Rambling on and on when we're reaching out trying to give you an opportunity to speak out. You've been throwing this back in our face. We know people learn from you, but lately all you've been teaching is hate. Has your heart been misplaced? Just for a reality check, we have old, old friends who have been in much deeper than you could possibly know at your age, and they are the LIVING proof that there's more than one way out (and all of them begin with personal choice.) Suga Shane, we know you have great potential, so why don't you step up to the plate?

I'm Out

I'm getting' out today.
I'm not gonna smoke, but I'm gonna grub and get laid,
hit Aztecs for a burrito,
and steal some Tostitos
from an amigo,
kick it with my people,
and cruise the City in a Regal.
Speakin' of getting' out, its time to go,
so I'm out like a boner in spandex,
out like a diva in dodge-ball. Peace!

-Big Heath

From The Beat: Good luck out there 'Big' Heath. We hope you stay true to your word by getting a job and staying out of here. Sorry about changing that last bang-up line, but we warned you. (And we hope we don't pay a price for leaving in the line before it...) You can hit us up any time you want. Keep your head up and stay free. And keep laughing!

Yesterday

Feeling sadder than yesterday
Not know why feeling so shy
Not know to talk about the feelings inside
Tired than yesterday
What to say is on the inside
Of my mind I changed no one
See but the same the rain
Of 50 days in seemed like no
Days passed the same thing every day
I am tired of the life of paying
To be cool, no school
No I am just a fool doing tricks to reduce
A full sentence of words not knowing what
Curves will get you nowhere
Fall down the stairs
It's rare that it happens to me
While I pay a fee
Why is this pain happening to me
Feeling more than yesterday
Speaking in what I don't understand this —
Why is this for me to learn?
I earn more than I get
Yesterday is yesterday
Today is for me.

-Berry

From The Beat: Once again, you spin words like a web, creating patters intricate and revealing. Meanings slip and slide, resting for a second before vanishing before we can grasp them completely. The last lines, though, offer a sense of hope and promise — not only for today, but for the future as well. How will today be better than the days before? How can your series of better todays pave the path for a brighter tomorrow?

Young Buck

(Dedicated To That Girl)
As a young buck, all he wanted was a buck.
In an unjust world, he had a great deal of luck,
looking on the ground for money to pluck.
People who told him to keep his head up,
he looked at them like dump trucks,
not knowing what they told him was right — he had no trust. With his noisy stuff, and shoes scuffed,
he ran the streets to see amazing stuff:
Pimps, thugs, and drug dealers getting put in handcuffs.
Something about the streets gave him a certain kind of lust. Now that young buck
is hustling on blocks, messing with them ducks,
he's spending his money on materialistic stuff.
Now little homie in cuffs and stuffed
in the back of a patrol car,
not knowing he is officially known as a ghetto superstar.
I'm looking for a beautiful dame to state claim,
and don't hang over my shoulder every time my cell rang.
Are you da' one who can fulfill my deepest passions?
I'm not talking about whips, handcuffs, and lashing.
I'm talking about some porno-action:
Lights, cameras, and action.
I need a girl who can put more action into me than Jackson,
a girl who doesn't care about the dough I be flashin'.
Just a babe I can sip XO with, and be relaxin'.

-Suga Shane

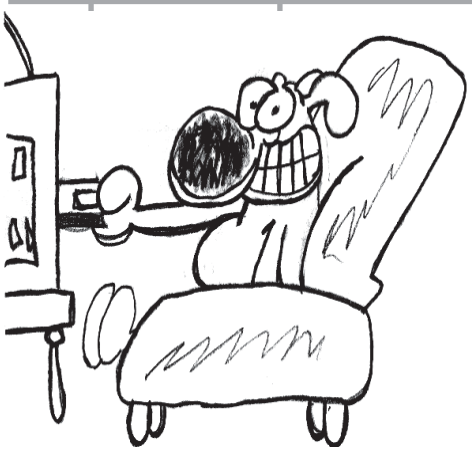
From The Beat: What a shame! Suga Shane is still shooting rhymes without watching his aim. Glorifying a game that has already caused him so much pain. When will he ever change? We had to cut a line because it was too disrespectful towards women. How could you call yourself Suga when you're about as sweet as spinach? Talk down to the ladies while cuddling with county linens. Sometimes your pieces have our heads spinning, but if this piece was a baseball game, we would've left in the second inning. We'd appreciate it if you could respect The Beat because we've been feeling your writings from the beginning.

Sinful Temptations

I'm like a star, high up in the sky,
just a few more months, and it's my time to shine.
I'll be wise in the streets, alert like a cat. You'll catch me in the cuts, and you won't be getting fat.
I'll educate myself as much as I can:
push, pull, and strive throughout my life span.
I'll still be a youngsta way deep in the game.
The world is a ghetto. There's no one to blame.
The Bay is the area where I lay. So. San Francisco is the town where I stay,
and until this day, I show no pity,
but God bless my homeboys maintaining in my city.

-Kermit

From The Beat: It seems as if you're falling victim to these sinful temptations. We had to change a line out of your piece because you couldn't control your urge to disrespect another group of people. What exactly has "your city" that you and your homeboys maintain done for you — besides paying the cops that wrap you up and building the baby jails to keep you in? Yeah, we can sure understand why you'd be down for that! We will never openly tell you to stop banging even though we want you to. However, we can tell you to stop using The Beat to disrespect other groups of people. So that's what we're doing. Stop!



I Wanna Know

(Dedicated To All Females)
I wanna know
Which way you wanna go
So I can be by your side
And we can forever ride
I wanna know
Who called you a 'ho'?
You need to tell me
Who disrespected you?
Tell me something, boo
I wanna know
Come on baby girl, let's roll
It's up to you to choose the right road
I wanna know
What's on ya' mind
I wanna make you mine
I wanna know
If you're gonna do something with your life
I need a smart girl to be my wife
I wanna know
If you don't want me to let go
I promise I'll keep a tight hold
If I can know.

-Prince Charming

From The Beat: We're sure the girls who read this are going to feel what you're saying. Compare how you treat women to how your friends treat women. What makes you special? Does your mother have anything to do with how you treat women today? We think she does.

Survival

I live a hard life. My family doesn't have much money, so I have to hustle to get it. It's not that I want to sell drugs, it's just I've been too young to get a job. Now that I'm old enough to get one, I can stop grinding.

I also have to carry a gun to survive because in my neighborhood, it's dangerous to walk down the street. I don't like it because I'm not that kind of kid, but I have to do what I have to do to eat, stay alive, or even go to school. I'm not doing it just for me, but for my little brothers and sisters, as well.

-Prince Charming

From The Beat: If you have to do these things, then I guess we understand. But when do we really "have to" do anything? Sometimes people try so hard to convince themselves that they have no alternatives because they need a rationalization, a justification for doing things they know are wrong. Are you one of these people? Do you know anybody like this? And even though we understand what you mean about carrying a gun, we also know that guns have ways of turning on their owners, like having a pet cobra. What you can do now that you don't 'have to' grind and carry a gun?

On Becoming Donald Trump

Success to me is getting a nice job, taking care of my family and makin' it another year, that's success to me.

My life ain't perfect so I can't say a lot about what the next man needs to do. I need to get my shhh together, then I might have a say so. But I'm 'bout to get out pretty soon and do something positive with my life, like do some shhh Donald Trump do. I'm out.

-Young Quis

From The Beat: We admire you for recognizing that you have to get your own house in order before you start giving advice about someone else's house. We also think your definition of success sets up goals that you can attain, and that are worth going after. Just remember this, Young Quis, Donald Trump didn't begin the way he is now. He educated himself, studied finance and business and worked hard to do whatever else he needed to move on up, and only after he built that foundation was he able to build the House of Trump. You've got it within you to do all those things, YQ, and we're pushing for you to do it. (Just don't forget The Beat when you pull in that first mil...)

Shabs!

Shabs is something that you don't wanna do or be off of. It sends you on missions that you would like in a way, but you should know right from wrong. See, it sent me to a place like this doing stuff I was not supposed to be doing when I knew the things were wrong, like disrespecting my mother when she was putting food on the table and a roof over my head.

I thought that she was trying to interrupt my habits of being out, doing stupid stuff like out robbin' people for stuff that was not worth it. Then it got back to my moms while she was at home, worried about me.

Now I'm just thinkin', thankin' her for what she has done for me. Now I'm in B4 getting my thoughts and acts together. I am going to get out and go to school, get a job and attend Jack's Omega Program because I wanna get my life together.

Shabs ain't the life to live on the block. I'm gonna get right and get game tight. Just watch and write, that's my life.

-Mizary B4

From The Beat: Goals are something we all need to have, because without goals, we don't know what to do or where to start. You said you are currently getting your thoughts and act together, so have you set goals for yourself to achieve? You've mentioned going back to school but what about the block?

Dear Lord

I thank You for this second chance,
Now I lead my life in Your hands,
Which gonna send me to right paths,
Instead of wrongs,
Put me in da place where positive belongs,
And not where the gun belongs
All that bull leads me to where I don't belong.
Man, I am gonna leave the block alone,
'Cause what is it gone do when this young person is gone
I just wanna be left alone.

-Mizary B4

From The Beat: This is the beginning of what could be a major change for the good for you, Mizary. But if you're asking for the Lord's help, what do you think the Lord is asking of you? Wanting to be left alone isn't enough (even though we appreciate the wish) , so what is your plan for dealing with funk, temptation, and the street life when it comes knocking?

Can't

I got glasses but I can't see
I got air but I cant breathe
I got a life with no future.
I got a release date I wont make.
I got friends to the end (ha,ha,ha).

-Diamond PG B4

From The Beat: So what are you trying to say, that we can give up and stop wasting our time trying to lay you some knowledge. Without more, we don't know what you're really saying, or why you say it. Like we've said before PG, we think you're more interested in getting as many pieces in The Beat as possible without spending the time to get under the surface of things and teach something of importance. Why does your life have not future? Anything to do with your own choices?

Interview With Weasel and Louie

L: S'up, son?
W: Nothin', kid.
L: So, what're really good, Diplomac?
W: I'm just up here poli-ticking, man.
L: What do you think about these balla blockas trying to knock a homie's hustle?
W: Man…you know, I really got no opinion of them suckas. I'm keepin' it ghoda.
L: Do what you do best, son. Don't let them suckas knock you, kid. Words is bond.
W: I'll never let a sucka knock mines. I'm a boss tycoon. That's network wit' real ninjas.
L: That's how shhh goes, son, where playas play and hustles ball out, you dig? 'Til next time, as the 'hood turns.

-Weasel and Louie B5

From The Beat: There's nothing in this piece that shows the talent that both of you possess. It's got meaning for the two of you, but nobody else. Come on, boys; let's step up and show us that you're about to be men…

It's Not A Game

Keep thinking it's a game till your head gets pop
Your brain pop out like jacking a box
The whole summer time is the kill season
It's hot out here but that's still not a good enough reason
Keep thinking it's a game when you get hit up with that gun
I bet you won't want to play no more but that's where we get wrong
Because it's not a game, and it's really not to be played

-Lil' Dakota B4

From The Beat: No, it's not a game, but all the cards are stacked against you. So we hope you hear your own words when you're tempted to go back to what most of the young people in the Hall call "the game." There is a famous movie called "War Games" where a computer calculates all the ways a world war can be won, and concludes there is only one way to win: Don't play.

I am going to get out and go to school, get a job and attend Jack's Omega Program because I wanna get my life together.

Street Love

I love it when I go outside and smell dem streets
I love it when I crack open a forty and take a sip
I love it when I'm riding and blasting the music
And I just ride wit' the beat
I love it when a hayna show love to a ninja like me
I love it when I'm in the barrio and see all my homies and Gs
I love it when I roll a blunt and get high
Like a bird in the wind
I love the streets and the streets love me
And I'm a just keep it real
And just be me
Ya feel me?

-Whiskey B5

From The Beat: How can you "smell dem streets" when your reeling from the effects of that forty? Can you imagine your freedom without relying on the alcohol (which we know, from first-hand experience, is terribly destructive of mind and body over time)? Be like the bird in the wind you write about, and not like the bird in the cage that you are now…

An Adult Or A Child?

In three weeks I'll be going to court for my 707 hearing. I been in here five and a half months stressing over this 707 because it got me thinking about my freedom.

But now, if God say the same, I'm gon beat that. But now, if I don't I can bail out, so it goes both ways.

But you feel me, what go happen go happen.

-Lil' Dakota B4

From The Beat: It is not fair to have any child to be charged as an adult, but sometimes, we humans get what we ask for — even though we didn't really ask for it. You're right, for your 707, what will be will be. But after that, Lil' Dakota, you have some say in what will be. Make wise decisions because you know what will be if you don't.

Diamond

Devoted = Down for life
Interdigitate = Locked in
Asp = Going against me is suicidal
Made=I got it
Optimize = Gotta make it worth it
Noble = High born
Dominate = Tha ones
This is what I stand for. I will never change. A Diamond is the only Gem that can't be cut by anything except itself. Me an' my Diamonds can't be cut by any.

-Diamond PG B4

From The Beat: Yes, the stone/gem diamond can't be cut by anything but by itself, but you on the other hand, are different. We've seen the scars and marks on your body (and can guess at those on your soul), so stop fronting. Get yourself out of here and start shining like a diamond.

Baby Girl

(Dedicated to Lakeisha T)
This is dedicated to a very special person in my life. I truly never thought that I would be in love with a female, the way I'm in love with this one.

Now, is it really me and you against the whole world
Tears of joy is rollin' down my eyes 'cause I'm in love with you, girl
You ain't even gotta trip, I'm gon' always be thankful
And all the shhh we gon' go through, I'm gon' still remain faithful
Now, can you tell me, tell me if my dreams gon' come true?
Me and you getting' married, doin' the shhh that we do
I never thought that I would make it this far in the game
Truly never thought that I would be spittin' bars with yo' name
But everything that happens, it happens for a reason
I'm gone love you girl, until the day I stop breathin'

-Roy B5

From The Beat: It sounds to us that you've grown up a lot since you left for Nevada and came back. We don't know if it's stuff you learned in the program or just the natural process of maturing — or a combination of things — but whatever it is, you don't sound like the same old Roy. That tells us that even if Lakeisha doesn't turn out to be "the one" (and we hope she does), you are still moving along the right path. Can you feel the differences in yourself?

The Life Of A Teenage Convict

It's like a never-ending story.
As soon as things start lookin' good, something takes the immediate glory.
Sitting in the Hall, life is so boring.
I close my eyes and my spirit starts soaring.
Please, please, please,
I found myself for the thousandth time in YGC stuck on my knees
Tears flowing like the river of Mississippi.
Lord, I'm so sorry, please forgive me.
I want to get help when I ran, I was confused about what I was feeling.
I wanted to feel love,
Be back with my folks to hear I love you lil' cous'
And why are you messin' up yo' life just to be with us? We're no good for a young bright thug.
It makes me feel loved to hear this from OGs like my cousins and my sis.
Who currently two out of three are locked up.
My sis is in 850 and my cousin is in Redwood City, Along with my moms, served six months already maybe looking at twenty with an L.
I'm heading down that path of a convict
But I'm just getting sick of all this shhh
And I'm only in the Juvenile system.
My cousin tells me about his prison times, and I'm like hell naw,
I don't want to live my life behind county walls.
I just keep coming back to the Halls.
I'm tired of this.
A special thanks and a shout-out to my cousin,
He convinced me to turn myself in.
People thought he was a living, breathing sin
But ninjas just don't know that they was wrong about my cousin.
A 37-year-old is steady stressing over me, just a kitten. Thank you for hella knowledge,
I'm going to keep doin' my thing
And finish my thing
And finish my shhh in Oakland Thunder Road
I'll see you in about nine to twelve months or so
Love you all!

-Baby Foila GU

From The Beat: Interesting flow/prose piece, Foila. What we're getting out of it is that you are desperately looking for love, but we can't help but feel that you're looking in the wrong places. It's not that the folks you're hanging out with, or loving, are bad people, but you seem to be unable to be with them and stay away from the drugs that are harming you and keeping you behind the walls of the Hall or some rehab program. You are valuable and lovable, Brittany, an easy thing for us to say, and a difficult thing for you to believe, because you're not getting the love you need. Can you be patient with your sobriety and find love in yourself and with others who can encourage you in words and deeds?

Quotes

"If you're only worth your word, then it's worth nothing, but if you put your words into actions, that'll mean much more."

-Lil' Ques

From The Beat: Indeed. Are you doing this yourself?

I Had To Turn Myself In

I'm here because I did not go to court and I forgot I had to go to court today. I did not know I had court, so my PO called me and said, "Why didn't you not go to court?"

I said," I forgot."

He said, "You got a bench warrant, so you have to turn yourself in and you will get out tomorrow."

-Bryan B1

From The Beat: The smart thing you did was to turn yourself in, Bryan. One night isn't so bad. The next time you have to go to court, don't forget! That's part of your responsibility, and no one else's. The sooner you get your probation over with, the sooner you'll be really free!

Don't End Up Where I've Been

What's really going on with all young street punks? Well, my name is Jamal up here in B5. Just came back from the Y.

I really ain't tryin' to see nobody in the same situation I'm in. I've been locked up for thirty months and got five more years to go. I came back for getting in a fight with the staff up there in Preston. I've seen it all and I hope you boys and girls do whatever it takes to not end up where I've been.

I'll get at The Beat next time, because it's that time to go back to the box. So stay up and be yourselves, you dig? Oh, yeah. Lil' Joe, be cool up in ROP and I love you bro, for real!

-Lil' Tae

From The Beat: This is good advice, Lil' Tae, but can you get specific? What will it take for these young people not to follow your example? What do you think they should be doing? What should they not be doing? Is there anything positive about your experience at the Y? It would help a whole lot of youngsters if you could spell out some of the specific experiences — good and bad — you've had in the Y.

Eyes Through The Camera

If I had six hours or so to show you through the eyes of a camera what freedom means to me, I would show all the things on the outs that I don't care for — like killing, drugs, haters — and all the things I do care for — like family and friends that are there for me, home, sisters, and brothers, the ones who love me and the ones I love.

-M B4

From The Beat: How would you show that you hate the things you hate and love the things you love? When we look at your video, how will we know you're not celebrating the killing, the drugs and the haters? Since you don't have a video to make, how will you leave all these things to the side when you taste freedom again?

I've been locked up for thirty months and got five more years to go.

Feelings

Yo, I'm deep like a ship in the ocean
But I move faster than a mouse
That's in hard drive after its cheese
That's in slow motion
I am like MLK in yo' dreams
When his blood's pumping through my veins
It's like he's showing me all the scenes
My heart is my brain
But in some crazy world like it's all the same
My gold ones bling like Little Wayne
But if my lining ain't straight
Then so is my brain
My mind is like a girl's
But soft, so when you touch it
It clutters to blood

-Jerome B1

From The Beat: We like how this sounds, Jerome, but we don't understand many of the images. For example, what scenes does MLK show you in your dreams? What do they mean to you? How is your mind like a girls, and what does it mean that it clutters to blood when it's touched? We'd love to read an explanation of these phrases, Jerome.

I Don't Even Remember What It's Like On The Outs

During this year, before the first time I got locked up, I became worser and worser until I got caught. Every time I did something bad, it was worser than the last time. Then I finally got locked up for my first time. I was really lucky to get out only after three weeks, because I had really serious charges.

When I got released, I became completely crazy. I got into a fight with five people; then my friend stabbed one of them. I had, like, three rumbles in about three weeks. The second time it was a three-on-three. I got lucky that I got caught the second time for something not as serious, which could have escalated into some really, really serious. If I didn't get caught in time, I could gave spent the rest of my life in jail.

The second time I got locked up, which is this time, I've been locked up for five months. Now I don't even remember how it's like on the outs.

But I have changed a lot. I'm trying to stay away from trouble as much as I can. Some people are really getting on my nerves and I really want to fight them, but I got to be smart and control myself. I was a real loud kid, but now I just wanna be a square, because I'm sick of all this.

-Jj B1

From The Beat: Ivan, you're an amazing guy. You have good insight into what was going on in your life before you got busted. Why do you think you "went completely crazy," and how will you keep yourself from letting it happen again. (The fact that you are controlling your anger now tells us that you can do it on the outs, too.) Can you think of anything other than the Hall that might have stopped you before things turned tragic? When you get out, it will be up to you, and the choices you make, but we've watched you grow up, so we know it's in your power. By the way, we think you DO remember what it was like on the outs, and what you have to remember when you get back there is what it was like on the ins...

Like A Caged Animal

I don't feel being locked up. It feels like I'm being killed. Being locked up is being washed up doing everything for the next people when I'm supposed to listen to my mom.

So I wanna know why this is where I'm at.

-B Smoke B4

From The Beat: If you don't know why you are where you are, who does? You are the only one that can answer that question. If you hate it so much, why did you put yourself in this position? What will you do to stay out forever?

Smile

What makes me smile is the sunshine
That shines up above
The sweet rainbows that glow in the sky
pleases my eyes . . .

-Whitlee

From The Beat: You started writing a beautiful poem there. Does anything else make you smile?

My Son's Face

Seeing my son's face in the morning when he first wakes up makes me smile. How he just looks up at the stuffed animals on his mobile and starts to laugh and yell at them.

-Happy Parent

From The Beat: Now that you realize what makes you happy, it's up to you to make some responsible decisions to stay out and see your son wake up in the morning. Then you'll have something to smile about every day.

More Hurt

In my life I've been hurt more than I've enjoyed life.

-Jessica

From The Beat: You aren't the only one, Jessica. There are many other people that have been hurt too many times. You have a lot of courage for telling us that. That tells us a lot about your character. It's not going to be like that for the rest of your life. Keep your head up, and remember good things come to good people.

Hurts So Bad

Yeah, I have hurt someone. Actually, I've hurt lots of people. Mainly though, I think I hurt my friends the most. I screwed up, so now I probably can't see them again. My PO like that idea though. He just don't know about how they help me get through all the drama and shhh.

I think my mom did some messed up stuff, but when I went wit' my dad, homie, you will not believe. When I was wit' him, I started on drugs, prostitution, and got into a gang. Yeah, I got more streetwise wit' him, but that shhh got me in hekka, hekka trouble.

Also, I hurt a lots of my main peeps by don't dat shhh. I ain't seen them in hekka, hekka long time and wit' my situation right now, I ain't never gonna see 'em again. For sure I can write them, but it ain't da same. It ain't like kickin' it in our neighborhood and just bumpin' all that Tupac or that Masta P and rollin' around in my main homie's latest whip.

Now 'cause I done all this shhh and done messed my life all the hell up. Now I going on an ankle bracelet and I can't leave the crib fo' shhh, homie. I done messed up so bad by all the yellin' and fightin' and arguin' wit' my parents that they done got sick and kicked me the hell out.

A word of advice to all the homies locked up, keep ya head up, and word up to my Aunt Jamie up in Prison.

-Money

From The Beat: Everybody makes mistakes, you just have to learn from them. But that's only if you are willing to learn from them. You don't have to live life like that. You have other options available for you but you have to let yourself get expose to them. Keep your head up and good luck. Try to stay out of here, we wish you the best!

So Bad

What makes me hurt so bad? The choices I make hurt me so bad. My parents make me hurt so bad. My anger makes me hurt so bad.

How do you deal with this pain? I don't know how do you it. This is how you do it. You erase it from your mind. You help other people; you ask for help, that is how you do it.

-Morgan

From The Beat: That is a good way to deal with your pain — help other people that might be going through the same thing you are. Everybody is gonna have to go through with pain, whether it's emotional or physical, and it's the way that you deal with your pain that shows what kind of a person you are. And you are a wonderful person.

What Makes Me Smile Is When . . .

I see my family and my little brothers and my sisters. And the other thing that makes me smile is when I see my boyfriend and when I talk to all my friends that give me advice and tell me that they care about me. And the times they listened to me and how they treat me right and how they are always there for me and how my family is always there and my baby boy that I love so much. These things make me smile.

So all you guys out there that are locked up, always think what makes you smile, and remember, don't let nothing get you down, just smile. Peace out that's all I got to say. Alrato, later.

-Marlen

From The Beat: It's good that you have a strong means of support; you have a lot of friends and family members that care about you. It's easy to take stuff for granted until you lose something or something gets taken from you. So enjoy your freedom with all your loved ones when you get out.

Standing Tall

I smile when I see my lil' brother chasing the lil' girls up and down our street. I smile when I see my nephew trying to crawl with his two bottom teeth coming out of his jaw. I smile when I think of all the days I was in my grandma's arms, and most of all, I smile when, of course, I'm standing tall.

-Lindsay

From The Beat: When you get out, stand even taller. Fight all those temptations you face and don't come back here.

Reminiscing

What makes me smile is when I reminisce about the good days I had and some of the stupid things that I had done in my past that at the time I was serious about but now when I look back on it, I just laugh at what a fool I was. So that's something I smile about.

-Hanna

From The Beat: You think that you are through with coming back here? Does the thought of never coming back to the Halls make you smile? At least we know that you know that you was actin' a fool, so get your thang straight and make some more memories outside the Halls.

What I Think

I think that some people who write to The Beat front. They try to act too hard, but really, deep down inside, they ain't shhh. They cry in their rooms and feel lonely. So what I don't get is why the hell are they gonna write something down just to try and look gangster?

You ain't hard 'cause your dumb ass is in jail, just like the rest of us. Face it, you got caught up, so instead of trying to be hard, just do your time. To me, the things you write sound stupid!

Keep it real, not fantasy, real. In your so-called gangster world a true G don't say shhh.

-Salena

From The Beat: It's coo' to have opinions, and we agree that some folks in The Beat do front, but why are you gonna trip off what everyone else is trying to be? Get your business straight first and then try to help out the people that are in there with you instead of hating, 'cause right now, you sound like you're trying sound hard, too.

Keep it real, not fantasy, real.

San Luis Obispo

The Victim

If I was face to face with my victim, I would probably be extremely rude to him. I feel no remorse towards my victim because he hurt me much worse. The only remorse that I feel is I shouldn't have said some things because now I have to be here in Juvenile Hall. Because of my actions. he is probably upset at me. His life wasn't changed because of me. It just brought sadness to the family.

I feel very angry with my victim also because of what he did. My victim is my step-dad. My victim would probably just ignore me if he was face to face with me. My victim probably still has resentments, but I know in the end he will forgive me.

-Lacy

From The Beat: What would be the best-case scenario when you get out? Do you want him to forgive you and for things to go back to the way they were? Or do changes need to be made? Does he need to step up and change? Do you? Do you see a way to prevent a similar situation from occurring in the future?

RIP Jack

Jack was the man who put me up in a house when my dad kicked me out. He helped me build my car. He was like another big brother to me.

He died October 9, 2003, after being shot outside of LA County after a deal went bad. When the paramedics reached him he was already dead.

I was in a group home at the time and I saw him on my last home pass. I was talking to him every couple of days to check on him and his family, and he told me he had to take some items to LA. I told him to be careful. Two days later I called my buddy, Paul, and on his answering machine he said Paul had been shot coming home from LA. The only thing that popped up in my head was "it's not his time."

-Frank

From The Beat: Losing someone that meant so much to you can be hard — our hearts are with you. You saw a side of your friend that was warm, caring, responsible, dedicated and strong. Do you think those characteristics will live on in you? Will you think of him next time someone needs your help? Or next time you attack a project like rebuilding a car? Do you worry at all about getting attached to folks who take big risks with their lives? Does it make you think at all about how you're living yours?

Eres Mi Todo

Te quiero, te necesito.
Eres la ilusión ,
que llena mi corazón.
Eres mi mañana, te quiero mamá.
Nunca dejo de pensar en ti.
Perdoname, mi amor,
ya no vuelve a suceder.
Prometo que jamás
la sensación volverá a sudecer.
Te quiero. Mi amor. Te necesito.

From The Beat: Chocho, que lindo poema le has escrito a tu madre. Si en verdad quieres a tu madre que sonrias, hazla feliz aunque sea una vez en tu vida, portandote bien. Un consejo, prometan cuando esten dispuesto a perdonar.

You Are My Everything

I love you and
I need you. You are the fantasy
that fills up my heart.
You are my morning,
I love you, mom.
I never stop thinking about you.
Forgive me, my love,
this will never happen again. I promise.
I love you, my love. I need you.

-Anónimo B1, SF/YGC

Hermosa Mariposa

(para Claudia)
Hermosa mariposa
Desde que te vi
Me enamoré de ti
Me gustas
Tanto sólo con verte me
Haces senreir
Eres mi lucero que me da las
Ganas de vivir
Espero que contigo mi vida
compartir.

From The Beat: No la dejes perder entonces. Si es tu verdadero amor, buscala y no la dejes ir. Uno hay que estimar lo que uno quiere, recuerda siempre eso.

Beautiful Butterfly

(for Claudia)
Beautiful butterfly
Since the moment I first laid eyes on you
I fell in love with you
I like you a lot
Just looking at you
Makes me smile
You are my shining star that
Gives me the will to live
I hope I spend my life
With you by my side.

-Tripiador, 150 Crew

Lo Que Haría Afuera

Lo que yo haría afuera ir a visitar a mi mama y darle un buen abrazo y decirle que la quiero mucho. También visitaría a mi hermana y le diría que también la quiero mucho.

Cuando yo salga, prometo portarme bien, estar con mi familia, y decirles cuanto los quiero. Yo sé que he cometido errores en mi vida, pero esos errores se acabaron porque de una manera o la otro me hicieron reflexionar y pensar distinto.

Ahora voy a pelear un caso muy dificil, pero yo sé que Dios me ayudará porque uno comete errores y así es como uno aprende. También, yo visitaría la iglesia porque Dios me ha hecho reflexionar muchas cosas. ¡No más errores!

From The Beat: Esperamosq ue esta diferencia que te ha enseñado estar preso te ayude mucho en tu vida. Ten fe en Dios si en verdad estas pensando en tu caso, tu vida, tu destino, tu verdad y la sabiduría. Esperamos que desde ahora en adelante no vuelvas a cometer errores, y si lo haces procura de no volverlos a hacer.

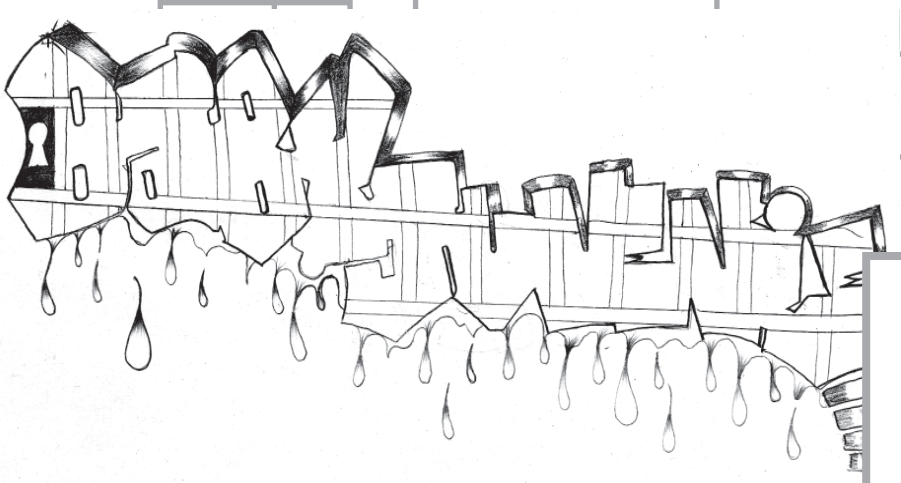
What I'd Do On The Outs

What I would do on the outs is go visit my mother and give her a tight hug and let her know that I love her very much. Also, I would go visit my sister and I would also let her know that I love her very much.

When I get out, I promise that I am going to behave myself, be with my family, and let them know how much I love them. I know that I have committed errors in my life, but one way or another, those same mistakes, or other mistakes, aren't going to happen because since I've been locked up, I've been reflecting on how my life is, and it has made me think differently.

Now I am going to fight a very difficult case, but I know that God is going to help me because one learns from their mistakes. Also, I would go to church because God has made me reflect on a lot of things. No more mistakes for me.

-Florel B1, SF/YGC



He Cambiado

Yo he cambiado mucho porque he pensado mucho en lo que hice y me arrepiento de lo que hice. Por eso quiero cambiar mi forma de ser y no cometer más delitos.

From The Beat: Eso esperamos porque la verdad es que no te queremos aqui, del todo. Cuida lo tuyo y a tu familia. Suerte en tu vida.

I've Changed

I have changed a lot because I have thought a lot about what I have done and I regret what I have done in the past. That's why I want to change my character and not commit anymore errors.

-Victor, 150 Crew

Mediante Iba Creciendo

Bueno, yo he cambiando porque cuando estaba en la casa de mi mamá, yo era muy malcriado con ella, pero mediante iba creciendo y creciendo, yo iba madurando. Yo ahora no soy malcriado con ella. Ahora la quiero más porque es la única mujer que quiero con todo mi corazón porque ella es muy linda.

Bueno, uno puede cambiar en muchas cosas en un año. Puedes cambiar en su comportamiento, no ser como antes. Si uno anda haciendo cosas malas, no hay que hacerla porque a nuestras mamas, no les gusta, ni a nuestro Dios. Uno cambia, no siempre vas a ser mismo. Uno se siente muerto cuando pasa un año mas.

From The Beat: Si adora a tu madre, pero más a Dios, porque él es el único que se merece ser adorado. Después la madre de uno. Amigo, nos agrada mucho saber que has cambiado tu comportamiento con tu madre, acuerdate que ella es la única que siempre va a estar ahi contigo.

While I Was Growing Up

Well, I feel I've changed because when I was at my mom's house, I used to be disobedient with her, but while I was growing up, I was getting more mature. Now I don't bad behave with her. Now, I love her more because she's the only woman who I love with all my heart, and she's very beautiful.

People can change a lot in a year. You can change your behavior, and not be like before. If you used to do something bad before, you shouldn't do it anymore, because our mother and God don't like it. People change; you are never going to be the same. You'll feel the old you is dead a year later.

-Orlyn B1, SF/YGC

yo sé que Dios me ayudará porque uno comete errores y así es como uno aprende

welcome to... the beat without

LIL' SPANKS

The following two pieces come to us from Lil' Spanks, who's been good for a piece or more every week for the last few months. It's deeply painful to print these pieces — Lil' Spanks has taken us on a long ride with him, from Santa Clara County Juvy, to Trinity-Anza, to Santa Clara County Main Jail, to freedom, and now to Sacramento County Jail as he awaits trial on a slew of new charges. We hope that there's a lesson learned in these pieces for all of you who are about to get the chance hit the streets again — it's no joke (as Spanks says, the situation he's in now is "time stacking on top of time"). The piece "My Home In Hell" was initially printed almost exactly two years ago, and Lil' Spanks asked us to reprint it again today — it breaks our heart to have traveled all this way with Lil' Spanks only to end up back here again.

My Home In Hell

My home is one of heartaches
a place of steel and stone
a lonely cell
a home in hell and here I must atone
for my crime
I pay with time
where lights glare night and day
and though I rage
and pace my cage
I still must stay and pay
My home in hell
is one small cell
that no man wants to own
my body cramps
with the cold and dampness
that chills me to the bone
It somehow seems
that all my dreams
must wait for each tomorrow
you see my years
are filled with tears
of misery and sorrow
Every day I curse and pray
to every god that's known
to my dreams . . . my silent dreams
to release me from this hole
but don't be sad
it's not too bad
I hide it well within
no trace on the outside
it's all on the inside
what my trip through life has been
Men scream and yell
within my hell
yet I am a man alone
my tears and pain
are like bitter rain
spilling down on naked stone
I feel an ache
as though a stake
were driven through my heart
because these walls of steel and stone
are keeping us apart
I will not shame
or cast no blame
on you if you must leave me
for a love like mine
imprisoned by time
will die unless set free
Too bad
so sad
that we could have
must have to wait to be
but nothing lasts
and soon I will be free
and you can always count on me
to make you smile
to keep you safe
to bring cheers
for many years
to hold your hand
to be your friend
and to stand by you
through thick and thin
But right now I am alone
just hanging on
and being strong
for you alone
because you are the queen upon my throne
Late at night I wake and listen
to all the snores
behind steel doors
and long for all I'm missing
which is you
my precious you
the one I should right now be kissing
instead of missing
Yeah
I know that I am far
behind steel bars
with memories that hurt so much
I feel the sting
of metal rings
the sound of keys
the scrape of feet upon concrete
as guards patrol these blocks
in here convicts' knives
take human lives
no jungle holds more danger
And every day that passes by
I still must say
each man remains a stranger
my chains of steel
can never feel
the things that I hold dear
but the convicts within
are kinder than
the men who keep me here
Every day I fight
to hold the right
to call myself a man
Yes
I am the same
as other men
Yeah
I am afraid to die
but given the chance to flee
you know that I would try
even if they kill me
I fear the beast
who comes to feast
upon my very soul
who takes my love
and leaves behind a hate I cannot control
it eats my heart
devours all parts
and all my feelings crumble
A friend could die
but would I cry?
Not now perhaps not ever
They came today
to take away
the man who lived next door
to end his plight
which was his right
he took his own life
he was a shame
without a name
he had his fame
he played his game
came up short
he couldn't take it no more
The secret I shall tell you now
but do not tell another
a man will not survive in here if he allows himself to smother
he talks the talk and walks the walk
and though he plays the part
he cannot show
and no one knows
what lays deep within his heart
I wear a face
without a trace
of any fear inside
but here is a secret that no one knows
of this frightened man I hide
it's hard to see
to just be me
in a world where death
is just a test
so I had to be
I'm sure you see
a little colder than the rest
so if something fatal should come my way
should someone take my life
just tell my family and friends
I love them dearly
and that I fought with all I had until the end
It wasn't easy
for them to win
my one desire
should I expire
is
no one cry for me
just keep thoughts of me within your hearts
and know that I died strong
and remember this
for what it is
I am finally free
but not from the spell
the magic spell you put on me
so do me a favor and keep smiling
for me.

Every day I fight
to hold the right to call myself a man

LIL' SPANKS (CONT.)

In This Mess . . . Again

As I get older and wiser
my mind becomes sharper and brighter
watch me start a fire
without matches or lighters
Trip on that
and when you figure it out holla on back
I said it before
but I feel the need to say it again . . .
"It's a split second decision
between the cemetery and prison"
but I still go against the grain squashin' all existence
of competition
Untangle knots like a comb and its bristles
two torpedoes make a missile
hear the whistles?
Life!
So loud and clear in the echoes of crystals
and pistols
but then again
I brought myself here
and all of a sudden
I'm asking God for his forgiveness
towards my sins
Better him
than anyone else
to knock the dust off my shelf —
can you dig it?
I feel I fell
in the deepest pit on earth
every day my situation seems only to get worse
bless this curse
I'm stuck in the ground
I yell for help but no one hears my sound
or maybe they want to see me drown
Lines have been double-crossed
instincts tellin' me that I'm 'bout to be washed
This is the ending result life on the grind
time stacking on top of time
a thousand pounds of stress crushing my mind
the light's going dim but still continues to shine
I tell my girl
"Mamas, go about your business and let me do my time"
but she refuses to hear me and says
"You really must be crazy
if you think I'm gonna turn my back and leave your side"
She won't go no matter what I say
and how hard I try to push her away
she tells me, "Let's rock and roll, baby!"
I have to admit:
she makes me feel good
keeps a smile on my face
lifts my spirits and motivates me in every which way
still I tell her go —
that way I save us both from the coming heartaches
feel me?
This is life putting me in another one of its tests
I fight it well with all my inner strength
and yet
I feel it diggin' into my chest
and shortening my very last breath
How did I ever get myself in this mess . . .
again?
One love.

time stacking on top of time
a thousand pounds of stress crushing my mind

JAMES ANDERSON

James Anderson delivers yet another important piece from San Quentin's Death Row. James is a real advocate from his cell, a man with plenty of information looking to not only better his difficult situation, but to help all of us who are looking for a way out, a better life. Peep these commandments and take them to heart, they could save you some trouble.

The 18 Commandments of Common Sense for Success

1) "If your MIND can conceive it, your HEART believe it, the body can ACHIEVE IT" (everything known to, and created by, man began with a single thought).
2) Honor your goals, dreams, and visions with EFFORTS and ACTIONS.
3) Trust, Respect, and Commitment are the FOUNDATION and KEYS to success.
4) SUCCESS comes in CAN'S and DO's; (CAN'T has never done anything-for ANYONE).
5) Those who tell you, "You can't DO that," are really just saying, "I couldn't do it." NEGAHOLICS will also tell you what "other people" CAN'T and won't DO. (Nothing beats a TRY, but a failure . . . Or NOT TRYING AT ALL!)
6) Always KEEP YOUR WORD in what you say you'll DO, no matter how insignificant it may "seem" to be (the longest chain is made of smaller single links), and know the DIFFERENCE between "TALKERS" and "DOERS!"
7) Stumbling blocks can be transformed into "Stepping Stones," but you'll never stumble onto success by just sitting down.
8) There are NO STUPID QUESTIONS: Except those that aren't asked.
9) To "ASSUME" makes an ASS out of U and ME (and is the Mother of most MISTAKES). With matters of IMPORTANCE, BE SPECIFIC (leave the GUESSING GAMES to children), without QUESTIONS, there would be no ANSWERS.
10) Never JUMP to conclusions or underestimate anyone (including YOURSELF).
11) No one KNOWS EVERYTHING about ANY SINGLE THING (true WISDOM has no EGO).
12) Lack of COMMUNICATION results in STAGNATION.
13) "Please," "Thank You," and "Excuse Me," don't cost ANYTHING, but can make the difference between EVERYTHING and NOTHING.
14) "NETWORKING WORKS," even while you're sleeping.
15) "TIME" and "GOOD HEALTH" are your most valuable assets (TIME=$$$$).
16) You'll never move FORWARD or UP if you're always LOOKING BACK or DOWN.
17) MIND your own BUSINESS and always know WHO you're DOING business with.
18) SUCCESS IS "WHEN PREPARATION meets OPPORTUNITY" — NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE SUCCESS!

The Beat Within

STEVEN GONZALES

It is always a humbling experience to receive letters such as the following. Steven takes us to task for some of the responses we gave our young writers about same-sex marriages. As you'll read in the following critique, Steven feels The Beat responded too harshly to folks who didn't believe that gay people should be allowed to marry. We agree that some of the specific "From The Beat(s)" Steven cites may have been one-sided and inappropriate, and we appreciate the reminder that we need to make our responses as objective and encouraging as possible. We stand behind our strategy of asking young people to open their minds to all sides of an issue, but as Steven points out, this must be done with compassion. It's clear that Steven cares passionately about this issue, but there are many issues in The Beat about which people feel passionately, and we hope to challenge all of our writers — as Steven has challenged us. If we did offend or intimidate any readers, we apologize and encourage everyone who writes to The Beat to express their opinions and to feel free to criticize and/or take on our responses as well. Thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention. Steven writes us from the SHU in Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City, CA.

A Concerning Letter

This is not my first time writing to TBW. As noted in my previous correspondence, I think what you all are doing to help these troubled kids is both wonderful and inspiring and deserving of many laudations. I have managed to sporadically obtain copies of your mag to read and, for the most part, enjoy as I hear the wonderful voices within its pages.

I write this today to express how troubling I find the "same-sex marriage" writings section in issue 9.08, and the overtly biased and ripping comments by the editorial staff in response to some of these kids' opinions. If you included this section to have them express how they "feel" about the issue, then bash those feelings because they don't conform to some still undetermined societal standard, or personal attitude, how is that going to encourage them to express themselves in the future? It is obvious that the editors of this particular section aren't as concerned with how these impressionable minds "feel" about it as much as attempting to force them to feel a particular way — a way clearly adopted by those editors.

In the instances where the youth has expressed either acceptance or indifference to the matter, the editors are very cordial in their comments, or brief to the point of complacency. Yet for those who openly express a disgust or disdain, the same attitude for such "feelings" seems to be reciprocated in every example. This is not the healthy and helpful exploration of adolescent social thought, but a very dangerous and unpredictable form of thought reform — like cults use, for those of you scratching your head.

To lecture these kids about the rights of human being and, in the same contrary breath, admonish them for adopting individual, however unseemly, views, is a flat out tragedy. It is amazing that "two wrongs make a right" is employed as strategy against these kids for evoking faith and belief as the reason for their position. I would like to add in defense of this, for the editor who wrote, "We're not sure where it says that in the Bible, but even if it does . . ." perhaps a review of Leviticus 18: 22 of the Old Testament will clarify the ". . . even if it does . . ." quandry with that editor's, though to state all of the sins one would think that person has a vast well of theological knowledge and need to be pointed to that specific abomination — one would think.

Let me quote: "What does your religion and culture say about pimpin?" ". . . but how do you know that's really what Allah said or meant in the Koran," ". . . why do we need more children in this world?" ". . . Why should you be disgusted by someone else's version of love unless it affects you?" "Do you know that it used to be illegal for two people of different races to get married? Do you think that's okay?" "The Constitution gives everyone the freedom to believe in whatever religion they choose — or no religion at all — so how can one religion (just because it's yours) impose it's law on everyone?"

Those are some of the subjective and, in my opinion, confrontational, remarks given by the editorial staff to these kids. Has someone totally ignored the adult responsibility to encourage them, or is the new program to de-individualize their thought process to fit a politically correct standard? There is even one instance where the staff asks one of these children if he can imagine making love to his girlfriend without penetrating her with his penis — by far the vilest remark I have ever been displeasured by seeing directed at a child!

Another interesting point, which seems to be an oversight, is where do our laws actually come from. With the evident brilliance of the editorial comments, it escapes me that one could expound on matters of "whose" law is right. Is it not the law of the people and the people being the majority? Hmm, interesting; now, how do you suppose the fundamental laws were derived? Oddly enough they are queerly similar to Biblical laws. And, of course, there's the multitude of texts concerning morals, which may be applied, so it's hardly convincing that any one doctrine of belief is trying to impose its laws! It is an amalgamation of numerous factors and considerations that determine our laws, culminating in the people ultimately deciding to whip a child with such a harsh verbal assault is rather undeserved; these kids do not have the degree of understanding in the complexities of psychosocial dynamics as we adults — well, some of us adults — and should not be held to the same standards, nor belittled because they don't understand!

Your publication is, for the most part, amazing, and a true jewel, for these troubled kids to have access to. I simply feel there has been a line crossed that needn't have been, or at least, should have been treated better. It is hard enough to suffer the daily confrontations of staff and other kids, and I think, in my humble opinion, that less aggressive remarks should have been employed if the editorial staff truly felt a need to defend the issue against the opinions of these young minds. Perhaps I am off-base and kids nowadays only respond to such tactics, who knows. I do know that of my thirty-four years, I have spent the past thirteen in prison and, prior to that, several more in the halls, camps, and YAs of CA, and my experience has proven to me that harsh criticism only breeds resentment and resistance. The heart no longer bleeds once it has hardened!

Although I never received a reply to my previous correspondence and, as disturbing as I found this particular issue, I still feel what you are doing has a overall positive impact and I will continue to read your publication when I have the offer extended to me.

I pray my words did not sting too deeply and that little offenses I may have created can be overlooked as my passion to say what I feel may benefit these wonderful kids — and to hopefully help you all to better than them.

Thank you for your time and I will hold no hard feelings if no response is given. This sort ranting was for purposes more poignant than self-serving. Take care all.

It is hard enough to suffer the daily confrontations of staff and other kids

THOMAS SAUNDERS

It's hard to know exactly what to say about the following writer and the incredible submissions he's sent us. His poetry and prose are all so beautiful and so tragic. Like most of the incarcerated people we've had the good fortune of meeting over the years, it's hard to comprehend how such talent and wisdom could be locked up in the prison yard rather than flaunted in the schoolyard. Though, to keep it real, the family situations and environments many of our writers grow up in paint a pretty good picture of what went wrong. Anyway, Thomas Sanders, once a prolific writer and stellar participant in our Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall workshops, has fast-tracked himself into CYA's worst facility, Chad. Please, all of you who still have a chance to take a different path, read carefully and get off the road that brought Thomas Sanders, aka White

Letter To The Beat

It's been too long my friends. I'm over at the NA Chanderjain YCF aka Chad now. I'm sure you've all heard stories about this place. Oh how I wish they were untrue! For the most part I'm maintaining, at least surviving, as best I can given the circumstances.

It always amuses me that the court (well, scares me, too) could claim to be so ignorant about the negative effects and physical dangers that CYA presents its wards. I'm in my cell, which is about half the size of those at the Hall, for 23 hours a day, and even if I were given the opportunity for more time out of my room, I wouldn't take it. So I sit in my room, as I am now, dreading tomorrow when I leave its comfort again for that fateful hour when the wall against your back is your best friend.

The 18 months I came with has quickly turned into 26 and it's sadly the least of my worries. Gangbanging or not, it's "me against the world" up in here. I don't pretend it's worse than it is; it'll be all right for a while. I don't mean completely chill, but okay for a while. When it kicks off it will do so for a few months, and when it's settled down it leaves us with a feeling of unreality that it's over and we wait for the next beef to come. There is no safety or sanctuary here. I can, along with everyone else, get out of my room with a piece of string or into someone else's even easier. It's a disgrace that the things that happen here are occur in America at all. Barbed wire and locks mean about as much to people here as, "I didn't do it," means to the police. If you're "on sight," you're gonna get rushed.

I do a lot of reminiscing in here, we all do, and I miss my homies out there, I miss the Beat staff as well as the words of its pages that brought me comfort on so many lonely nights. I miss San Jose, period.

There's not much I can tell you, you're gonna do what you're gonna do, and eventually, you'll pay for it. You need to listen because it's being told to you no doubt, before it's too late, homies. I know Mr. Walker gives it to you straight; you'd be dumb not to take it to heart, because you won't always have people looking out for you.

Well, I'm gonna leave it at that. Keep your heads up and your noses clean if for no one else but yourself.

Applez

You act as if I don't know
It's complicated
You act as if I don't know
We hurt equally

When we met I was just a pothead
And you were the desire of the whole football team

So I know just how it goes
And I feel constant tragedy
Only you can stop the flow
At your loss girl, I'm bleeding

You act as if I don't feel
My world is fading
You act as if I don't feel
The pain and loss
Now that it's over, I still can't move on
I need to be with you now but you're gone
And I know all too well

To My Family

Hey guys, I'm doing good. They moved me to a new facility; now I'm at NA Chaderjain, but around here it's called Chad. This place is 23 and 1. That means I am in this room for 23 hours a day and out for 1 hour a day. The hour I have out is spent with my back against the fence waiting to go back to my room. I have no roommate, but that's a benefit of sorts: one less thing to worry about.

But I'm sure you don't want to know. I just wanted you to know that I'm paying for what I've done and I can't find rest from this adversity. So you may be comforted in the thoughts of my well-earned struggle. Not that I expect any of you to be. Well, I don't know what to expect, whether there is hope for me to be found in any of you, I don't know, but for my own sake, I'd like to believe that there is. I doubt that anyone even reads my letters, but I will continue to pour my heart out to you even if you may be like a vase with no base with holes through the bottom, to me it signifies the readiness and faith to find hope.

I've grown a little taller, lost some more weight, but I'm surviving. I really shouldn't send this out, but I will this time because I am better. Don't think that I am crawling back, because if you do, you could not be farther from the truth of my intentions. I am saying I'm sorry once more with the hope that you, any of you, could show any love at all in the right way. It drains me to write to you all because it is very painful to be ignored when I am in such obvious despair by the ones who are supposed to love and be there for me. I expect nothing less than a broken heart to come from my attempts to be accepted by you, and there have been many letters left unsent, unfinished, and some not even started, but I have enough strength for this one this time.

Bootleg

I can't see through the past
Faith no more, I don't believe
It's all too recent
The wounds are too new for me
To give out the benefit
Because prominent are the doubts
That come to mind
When I urge myself
To give it one more try

Whipped

Women are missing in my life
All I see around me are dudes, homeboy
And that ain't right
Sure as the sun is hot
I'm slowly dying

Jay Dee Eye

There will be plenty of time to think
About the consequences
But tonight, come and dream with me
If nothing else went wrong
You'd be my wife
But let's not lie to ourselves
Remember tonight

Dilemmas

I can't pretend that I didn't choose to live this way
My heart is suffering so clearly
While my head defends my treasonous acts
Now all I want to do is good
It's hard with so little support
It seems no matter where I turn,
or what I do, failure tempts
I need to give myself another chance.

the beat without

SUNMANSLIGHT *Although we received this as a personal letter (we have been friends for some years), it is so full of profound thinking that we had to share it with The Beat. From a near-lifetime spent in cages, this remarkable writer, now imprisoned in Salinas Valley State Prison, ponders the meaning of life, the existence of God — and concludes that whether one believes or not, the world would be a better place if all lived by the religious commandments that boil down to this: love one another.*

Is This All There Is?

This morning I awakened with a question in my thoughts that caused me to understand that after 62 years, my existence has had little, if any, meaning. I sat upon the edge of my bunk; I looked around to seemingly, eerily, see for the first time the bare concrete walls of my cell, its steel door, my prison uniform folded neatly inside my metal locker.

At the age of nine years I sat upon another bunk, inside another cell at the Los Angeles County Juvenile Hall and looked around in the same manner, bewildered, feeling abandoned, scared and lost within a cold and uncaring world.

Again at the ages of twelve through seventeen years inside the cells at Nelles, Paso Robles, and Preston School of Industry, each an emotionally and psychologically abusive and destructive "Correctional" facility administered by the California Youth Authority. Except for seven years, I have existed in this manner since the young and tender age of nine. This morning I ask myself, "What happened? Why? Is this all the life I was given is to be?"

I am led to consider: I have loved, hated, robbed, murdered, been abused, have abused. "Is that life? Is this all there is? Or is there something always elusive until one's life is near end that will suddenly appear to reveal there has been purpose and meaning to what is past, and what is ahead? Will I at that very moment be given the prize I have sought throughout my lifetime, peace? Will it set me free for the first time since the age of nine? Or will I learn, as I have always feared, "life" is a mistake — a freak of nature?"

Here it is nearly day's end and I still have no answers, though I understand I had choices and decisions to make, and had I made the right ones, no doubt things would have been different. Would my life have been better? Would it have been worse? I cannot say. All I know for sure is it would have been different.

Should I try, I know I could never imagine the hell I have lived upon this earth getting this bad had I not been so angry that I refused to listen to anyone, believe in anything, and ignored that "gut-instinct" we all have.

I've no idea what is after death, if anything. People have a variety of theories regarding that. Most appear to believe in a God who promises eternal life in exchange for a "blind-faith" belief in Him or Her. Others believe we die and return to earth as someone, or something, else. Others are convinced we "evolved" from the dust and to dust we shall return. I have done a lot of reading on all these subjects. I have done a lot of soul searching. Any answers there may be have eluded me.

The world is so messed up it would be a terrible joke upon us all if there is nothing more after death. It is so screwed up that I am forced to reason that if there is not a God, we have reason to make Him up. Having read the Bible numerous times inside solitary confinement cells, my human logic could reasonably dismiss it as the writings of some con-man, or miserable people who needed a God to give purpose to their lives. Or I could accept and believe it all.

What I have done instead is conclude, God or no God, this would be a much better one if we lived our lives as if we knew we would go to some Heaven afterward. I am unable to find wrong in living life in accordance with the Ten Commandments. Does it matter who wrote them, or why? I do not think so within the hypothesis I write here.

I am forced by reason to question, "Why is it that those who believe that God did not write the Ten Commandments dismiss them as not worthy of their consideration?" Frankly, I am not a religious man, nor do I believe most, if any, of the stories written in the Bible. I have difficulty believing in a God who "sacrificed his own son out of His (God's) great love for us," and in turn allows so many children here on earth to live their entire young lives physically brutalized, and emotionally and psychologically tormented leaving them painfully scarred their entire lives. But, I damn sure know had I lived my life allowing the Ten Commandments to guide my judgment, decisions and choices, I would not have lived forty-six years of my sixty-two inside a prison cell.

The question, "What if there is a God?" scares the hell out of me. (No pun intended.) What if all we have heard about this guy is true, and in our arrogance, denied the possibility, however slight, that he exists, and went on about our lives as we are, doing whatever pleases us, and totally disregarding how anyone else feels about it? I say we would be in for a rude and miserable awakening far beyond any nightmares we suffered in this life.

What if when we die we learn we were wrong; that there is some guy with wings waiting to inform us, "You were wrong, Joe, Mike, Jimmy, Debbie, Lanna (whoever). You failed the test and now must pay the price for that failure?" What if instantly after we find our butts sitting on some red-hot coals realizing, too late, that our experience on earth was a cakewalk compared to what was then happening? For sure, every one of us has learned during our life to this point in time that anything is possible. How many times have we thought "no way" actually was?

I wonder how many people are gamblers like myself? I love the game of poker, and I have bet thousands of dollars on one hand many times. I have won, and I have lost. A good gambler is calculating and covers all bets. Life for me, as for most others, has been a "gamble" most of the time. Using gambler's "instinct," I surmise those of us "godless folks" who are miserable as the result of choices and decisions we have made, no matter the reason we did so, can only improve our miserable selves should we decide to live honorably, not steal, not rape and murder, do unto others as we would like for others to do unto us — all that stuff. Got to make things better.

Am I on the right track here? Who knows? If we live in this way, even those who do not believe in God, and if we learn He does exist after we die, He might take into consideration that though we doubted His existence, we did live as He said we should, and covered our bases best we could. Maybe we should ask ourselves, "What do we have to lose? What do we have to gain?" The obvious answer is, we have much to gain and nothing to lose — God or no God.

what if when we die we learn we were wrong

ERROL PATTERSON

It's nice to have Errol Patterson back in our pages, who also writes us from the East Coast. Errol writes us from an adult facility in New Jersey. We want to thank Errol for the props he gives The Beat and for the piece he submitted using the word "beat." We think it's a clever piece, and we hope you enjoy it as much as we did. We're not convinced that parents should have the right to beat their children at will, but we do agree that more parents need to show their kids love and attention and discipline them appropriately.

To The Beat Within, August 2004

How is all the staff doing? I hope everyone is doing great with health and strength. Give thanks to the almighty. I will forever ask Him to bless everyone who works within The Beat, so they can always continue the good work. Anyways, here is something I put together the same way, if comes to mind.

On The Beat, Meet The Beat Within

Mother scared to beat father, scared to beat.
Through the law, parents are afraid to beat,
so we grow up never experiencing what it is to be beat. Then
you stray off the beat
that your parents teach you to beat,
and end up in the street.
But when you hit the street, you sometimes get beat
from youths like you who went off the beat
and is living on the beat in the street.
You try to beat the system, but you never knew the police
was on the beat.
So you get caught on the beat.
Then the system getting ready to beat.
Then you wish your heart would stop the beat.
Now you lock up with other youth who was living on the
beat,
trying to beat the system
but the system always win the beat
if you are living on the beat in the street.
Your cellmate let you read The Beat Within.
That's when you realize how many lost on the beat
The you say maybe if my mother used to beat me
Or I was reading The Beat Within
On the street, I would never go off the beat
and get caught on the beat.
Now I hope The Beat Within will always be able to spread the
word
free within the walls of the system.
Thanks to The Beat Within
because after this time I know I am going to be a better
person within
all because of The Beat Within.
I truly love to read The Beat Within.
I will forever want to know what's going on
in the Beat Within.

Lastly, I tried to put this together because I believe that if some of these kids' parents could beat them at free will, life maybe would be better. Like the saying goes, "Save the rod and spoil the child."

Then you stray
off the beat
that your parents teach
you to beat,
and end up in the street.

Prison and CO

"CO" stands for correctional officer, but the stock market, private investors and freeholders over the years change them into cruelty officer.

The system is not trying to rehabilitate humans no more because it would cause the stock to drop and the farm would lose the flock, the herd, or whatever they see us as. The system don't even need us to reproduce no more when there is technology to clone us more.

The prison population is constantly rising because the investors are always fantasizing about the golf course game, because in every institution, jail facility, or prison, is Bob Barker's name. I know Bob is saying, "Come on down, the price is right," invest in prison and lock them down tight. It's four hundred years, they will not see the light, lock them down for another four hundred years, and we have every right. But in this great future, I hope they don't believe we have forgotten the past. I want them to understand that time is always the teacher of the class.



To The Beat Within, July 2004

Thank you for devoting so much staff time energy and concern toward everyone who is behind bars. Keep on doing the good work. I hope someday the magazine will go international and reach out far and beyond.

Thanks to all the staff again and I must let you truly know that The Beat Within is really making me making good use of my time. Well, here is something from the mind.

I was talking to my cellmate (I also let him read the magazine) you send me. So I put this together based on what and how he was living and what he thinks about his mother not beating him, how he got beat in the street, and how the system is beating him, and his meeting The Beat Within. Good wishes and a happy family day to all the staff when you receive this letter.

the beat without

SHAWMBA N. JONES

Our old friend, Shawmba, who has been delivering knockout pieces from the East Coast for more than two years now, and is back with some more knowledge and information to live by. Shawmba writes us from Delaware Correctional Center in Smyrna, Delaware.

Seven Shades Of Wisdom

(By: Dr. Abdulmunim Shakir related by Shawmba N. Jones to The Beat Readers)

He who knows not and "strives" to know is a "seeker," aid him.

He who knows not "what" he should know is a "wanderer," guide him.

He who knows not "what" he should know is also "asleep," "wake" him.

He who knows not and "rejects" to know is dead, pass him.

He who knows not, yet "claims" to know is an "imposter," shun him.

He who knows and "shares" what he knows is "wise," heed him.

Hope Vs. Hopelessness

Ask yourself, "Are you one of those people who has given up hope?" Given your situation, have you lost your hope of being able to stop smoking weed, stop doing coke, stop drinking alcohol, to stop dealing drugs, stealing, of finding a good job with a record, of going to college, of just staying a free man or woman? Have you lost hope of being a good father or just a good person?

If you have, then on your release day, you ask to stay till you get some hope, 'cause chances are, and statistically speaking, you will be back. You will be back because you have allowed yourself to get caught up in the trap of hopelessness. A person who has given up all hope will never be able to function in society and also be productive.

In understanding this, we have to understand that the hopelessness is only a part of perception imprinted upon you by society's opinionated beliefs, and it will only exist if we allow it to exist. It's all a matter of altering the way we view life.

In doing this, we have to begin to have hope again, and live for the future.

Quotes To Live By . . .

"The dignity of the individual will flourish when the decisions concerning his or her life are in his or her own hands, and when he has the means to seek self-improvement."

I mentioned this in the last Beat so you, the reader, could take ya time, and think about how true this is.

We've all been through life and had hard times that caused us to lose faith, to feel rejected, used, abused, neglected, abandoned and evidently worthless. We gave up because our self-esteem was crushed or because our loved ones told us we wouldn't amount to nothing. Our environments, along with the images fed to us through television and video, have conditioned the lower class mindset into thinking that being young and minority in the slums, projects and urban concrete jungles labeled as the ghetto — that we are only able to be drug dealers, pimps, and stick up kids in our own lower class 'hoods, not in Beverly Hills, not in Hollywood on Rodeo Drive, not on Wall Street, Park Ave. South, or the gated "high class" communities around the country, but in the neighborhoods we live in. And they contain us there with make believe fences enforced by cops if you cross em', so who's really in jail? Us or the society we call home that "they" call a drug area?

So in order to rise above it all, we must make a stand and empower ourselves. Instead of reading the "Source," read "Black Enterprise" magazines, read books on how to start a business, then apply what you learn, and you'll feel the sense of pride and dignity that comes along with it.

We gave up because our self-esteem was crushed

KEIR DAVIDSON

The following piece comes to us from a former Beat workshop participant and writer from San Francisco's YGC and Log Cabin Ranch, who has been a Beat colleague and facilitator for many, many years. We truly appreciate his presence as a facilitator and his skills as a writer. Keir is now a college student as well. We're happy to have his words back in The Beat after all these years.

Writer's Note

I wrote this one day when I wasn't feeling so hot. It's amazing how down we can get on ourselves when things aren't going the way we want them to. Just be glad that you can feel those things, you know? While things may be difficult, and the world can be a harsh place, just realize that you might not even exist to feel and experience those things. Let loose, let yourself see all the good things that are in the world, and when you happen upon those bad things, maybe you can work towards correcting them, and if that isn't your thing, just try not to let the bad things get to you.

Glad To Be Here

Life
There's nothing greater
Just to feel an emotion
We are truly blessed
To be Mad
To be Ecstatic
We are truly lucky
Those who don't feel
Stop depriving yourself
Don't be afraid to care
To show you are a real person
What are you scared of
Do you think you might actually see
See others' pains, others joys
See that things aren't right in the world
See how great it is simply to take another breath

MOSI BAKARI ***The following piece comes from Mosi Bakari, who answered our challenge to write a letter to the two three year-old girls whose fathers — one a police officer and one a gangster — were killed violently. This was one of our Beat workshop topics and Mosi decided to take it on himself. We hope you, too are moved by his beautiful letter. Mosi writes from Corcoran State Prison, in Corcoran, CA.***

Dear Child

With profound and sincere respect and feeling for you and your family's loss, we wish you well.

The how and why of your father not being there with you may only be seen and/or understood in the context and detail of his life and the events. Yet that takes time, and the details offer no comfort and won't change the fact that you and your family are without him.

But, at the same time, the fact that you and your family are without him does not mean that you and they cannot, nor will not, go on. For go on you must, and even stronger than ever. So now you must . . . breathe. Breathe deeply. Breathe deeply from the bottom of your feet to the top of your head. Notice how it strengthens your back and strengthens you body. Makes you lift your head. Still you mind and calm your heart.

Breathe. Breathe deeply. Every day. Keep your back straight. Your body strong. Your head up. Your mind still. Your heart calm.

No matter what happens. No matter where you are. When you feel confused or sad. When you feel weak or unsure. When you feel fear or lost. No matter how hard it may sometimes get or seem to be, breathe. And breathe deeply. From the top of your head and the bottom of your feet.

Breath is life. Life is breathing. They are one and the same. Breathe deeply and live fully.

How else can you, will you, honor your father, yourself, your life? Honor your father, your self, your life, by taking deep breaths and living your life fully.

Do the things that are hard to do. Be patient and forgiving. Think well of yourself and others. Learn and display good manners. Be a follower and leader of good ideas. If there is love in a thing, do it. There is love and life in music, learn to play an instrument. Sing! Trust and believe in yourself. Know yourself. Love yourself,

Protect your body, your heart, your mind, and your spirit from those who may try to hurt, misuse, or abuse you. Sometimes you will need to fight. Sometimes you will need to run, or leave. Learn how and when to do each. You have a life to live. Honor your father, honor his life, honor his memory, by honoring yourself. Honor yourself with good, long life.

Breathe and live. Breathe deeply and live fully.

Every day, no matter where you go. Keep your head up. Your back straight. Your body strong. Your mind still. Your heart calm. Your spirit shining. Live by honesty and truth, and your dreams will bear fruit.

Honor yourself, your life and you honor your father. Honor your father and honor us all.

Just breathe, and breathe deeply. From the bottom of your feet to the top of your head. Every day.

Excuse me, now I must write this letter to my own daughter.

Thank You, Dear one. Take care.

The fact that you and your family are without him does not mean that you and they cannot, nor will not, go on. For go on you must, and even stronger than ever.

LEON COOPER ***writes us from San Quentin State Prison's Death Row. Leon is a first-time writer, turned on to The Beat by our old friend, James Anderson. But back to Leon, what a surprising and freaky short story he submits. We look forward to more.***

Booty Call

There was a young man who loved "the look" on his older brother's face. He loved it because the older brother was in love . . .

At the age of sixteen, the older brother had met a beautiful young woman, who, when he first saw her, he knew it was love at first sight. He said that there was something about her beautiful, big, brown eyes that made him feel like he had known her all of his life. He often said to his brother that when he looked into her eyes, he felt as if he was looking into his own soul. He told his younger brother that he had been told that when you meet your soul mate, "You will know it, and she's the one who is to be your wife." He even told his younger brother about all the hot and steamy details of their perfect sex life, and just how perfect everything about the two of them seemed to fit. So, after five or six months, the older brother said, "It's time for mom to meet her future daughter-in-law," so he invited his newfound queen over for dinner for next Friday.

But something bad happened. His aunt passed away and the funeral was for Friday night. He was very fond of this aunt that had just passed away, and it hurt. It hurt because the dinner date with his queen would have to be changed. However, he went to school the next day and found his girlfriend and told her that there has been a death in the family, and he apologized for having to change their dinner date to another day. As he was telling her all this, she too looked saddened, and told him that she too can't make it on Friday.

When Friday came, the older brother arrived at his aunt's funeral, along with his mother, sisters, and brothers, and as he looked up, he saw his girlfriend standing at the curb outside of the funeral home. He then smiled and told his mother, "I told you that she loves me. She's here!" After the mother parked the car, the girl ran over and hugged the older brother as he got out of the car. He was smiling from ear to ear. Then he said to his mother, "Here's my girlfriend that I told you about and wanted you to meet!" The mother looked at him and said, "Boy, are you crazy?" That's your Daddy's older sister's daughter! She's not just your cousin. She's your first cousin! After the initial shock, they looked at each other with frowned faces, and he finally mumbled in a low voice, "Damn, I knew your eyes looked FAMILIAR."

The moral and lesson of this true story is simple: "KNOW YOUR FOLKS!" Because if you don't, you just may be having a BOOTY CALL with one of your closest family members.

the beat without

MICHAEL MANGERS

It's been a minute since we've heard from Michael Mangers, but this short letter tells us why. The story of being burned by a lawyer who has taken big bucks to represent you is, unfortunately, one we've heard before. What we like about this writer, however, is his focus on the future — despite the 21 years of prison that lie ahead of him . . . Michael writes us from "the hole" at Wasco State Prison. (Oh, and one more thing: It's ALWAYS cool to write us.)

Better Than A Life Sentence

Sometimes life is so predictable that it's boring and annoying! Other times it sneaks right up on you and POW! knocks you into the dirt. The latter has happened to me time and again in the last 6-7 months.

I am now at Wasco State Prison, in the hole, with a brand new 28-year sentence, of which I have 21 more years to serve! I released $2,400 off of my trust account to some punk-ass attorney, and he burnt me for it. I've written his boss, the state bar, but I don't know what else to do, but sit and wait! "Hurry up and wait" is the story of my life. Other than all that, I'm doing pretty good.

Actually, now that I'm sentenced, I feel more at ease about my situation! Three years in the county jail fighting 75 to life was rough, but I ended up taking a deal for 28 years because, like it or not, it sure is better than life. So now I can focus on what's ahead and make the most of it.

I have some good stuff to send you! My mind has cleared and I am able to direct my energy towards positive things rather than act a damn fool like I was the last few months I was down in the county jail!

I just want to make sure it's cool to send first. So let me know and I hope to hear from you sooon. Thank you for your time.

MICHELLE

The following piece comes to us from Michelle — Chelly Mac — who used to tear up the pages of The Beat from workshops Hillcrest Juvenile Hall. Michelle went from the Hall to the Y (a return trip for a violation), but there's a sense we get from her letters and pieces that this will be the last time she writes to us from behind bars. Michelle has spent time and energy trying to get a Beat program started in the Y, and just as she's gaining momentum, she's headed to the parole board and a likely release. The following poem hit us hard — it speaks to so many of you we see in our weekly workshops, telling it like it is from a person that's been there. Hopefully, the next piece we publish from Michelle will be written from our office.

It's All On You

Why you gotta do tha thangs you do?
I know you ain't a bad person
But you messin' up
Stayin' high, always drunk
Sellin' dope
Kickin' it wit' tha homies
Runnin' tha streets
Messed up
Gettin' locked up
Goin' back out an' doin' tha same thang
Not give a what
You into some bad business
But you ain't bad
People look at you an' think you bad
And you wanna be bad
But you ain't bad
You been makin' bad decisions
Why you wanna go an' do that?
Don't promise me you'll change
Then keep on doin' them same thangs
Love ya self baby
It's a cold world, an' tha game is deep
Don't fool ya self
While you tryna be a playa
But you playin' tha fool
Keep it real boo
How you gon' make it to tha top
On tha block?
Life is too short
To keep doin' tha same ol' thang
And expect a different outcome
Youth is rare
Childhood is almost non-existent
Where we come from
Why you wanna grow up so fast?
Yeah you do what you gotta do
But you tha only one who decides
Where you really goin'
It's all on you
(Dedicated to Sharky and all tha youngstas out there strugglin' to find tha right direction)

So now I can focus on what's ahead and make the most of it.



TEDDY BEAR

Teddy Bear is a new writer, but old reader, of The Beat Within. This week he drops a short but sweet poem for our pages. Enjoy. Teddy Bear writes to us from the SHU in Corcoran State Prison.

Love

If you love the fragrance of these roses
Then bear the thorns that come with it
The ornaments of the sky
Testify of your love
If you love Emily Martinez just as much as the sun shines
And the ocean wind blows wet and wild
Then this poem is a kiss to your mind . . .

SALVADOR PLASENCIA *is a new writer to our pages of The Beat Without. He is 22 years old and currently serving a life sentence in Pelican Bay State Prison. He writes to us from the SHU and drops some heavy game on us. We always like to hear from new people and we hope he encourages other folks to drop a few lines on us. He has lots to offer.*

A Youth Heart From Within

Can you tell me why do our young people sacrifice themselves? I didn't think so, because you are not a youth yourself. However you do set it up so that our youth don't succeed among us, because you won't fight for us in order to make sure we have a true and equal purpose in life. With that they are sacrificing themselves because you are not recognizing them and giving them something meaningful in their life.

There haven't been any programs where the youth can turn to and detect and discover certain educational programs that will educate them so that they can be enlightened on their own repercussions and consequences behind their actions that they took. You can't abandon our youth! But every year we find more and more youth gravitating to gangs, suicide, and drugs. Until now there is no community that is immune to it. How do we fix these problems that are around us? With prisons, by throwing our youth away like yesterday's newspaper. To doom them from freedom by zero tolerance? That will only contribute to making things worse than they are as of right now.

How can we truly decide how we can make things better? We need to recognize the creativity and intellect that our young people bring to this world. We need to recognize their gift and their passion and their own attributes with which they all have something to contribute in this world. There is no useless life in this world and we need to open the golden gates and stop saying that some lives are useful and some are not. I was once told by a public defender that was supposed to defend me that I wouldn't amount to anything. It has taken me a long period of time to not believe in that.

If you look around and see what our youth are participating in you will find that our youth are dying, their souls are being diminished. They don't know where to turn. Our youth needs to know that there is courage in this community. They need to know that people will stand up because they want to be courageous themselves.

However whether or not their loved one is actually guilty, it is the family members who are suffering and deprived of love and companionship, not to mention the financial support. But who are we to blame? I blame politicians because our youth are being targeted in order to set out examples. This is wrong because this allows the politics to bury our young peoples' souls inside the prison system. If you really look at it, our youth are being imprisoned in record numbers, yet the media will tell you that violence and violent crimes are down in all major categories. If this is true then that means that our kids are being targeted. They call this zero tolerance, which translates to racism because we are being pointed out. Yes, broken homes, uneducated, poor youth with poor backgrounds are being pointed out. You don't think so. Take a look inside your prison system; we are being pointed out and the book is being launched at us.

We need to dig deep into the root of the problem where we can allow certain programs to solve and discover the root of this behavior. Then from there, we can decide a certain punishment for our youth. This will allow our youth to a second chance in life. Plus this will prevent a major skyrocket in numbers in prisons and at the same time we are allowing our youth to grow and advance among us.

But we are caught in the midst of a hysterical American public, which dictates that all crimes committed receive the maximum penalties. This allows a stronger sentence with no hope of any rehabilitation. Now if the people were serious about rehabilitation, they would allow us to form a system that will educate our young people so that they can be formally aware of their actions of committing crimes and know the law behind them, rather than living without a purpose and falling victim to this corrupt system that we call justice.

I would be pleased to receive any responses in a positive manner to this topic. I am looking to those that have any objections to Prop 21, plus to those that can relate on this topic, and that it had an impact on. Thank you for reading...

beware because the system can come in many shapes and forms

What Does The System Owe Me?

Being tried and convicted of the many forms of manipulation and deception within the system, portrayed as equal, fair, and just, sends out a crystal clear message to all — whether you are guilty or not, seal the deal. Entrapment locks the unknown soul, locked away without a speck of light, life and freedom. Doomed from society, happiness, and family, which you are being forced to live.

Upraise the undying soul to uphold what is rightfully his, stand tall without fear with nothing to lose. Shine bright with the knowledge and wisdom that has been bestowed. Let it be the power to unlock these dark holes. Build your mind as sharp as a warrior sword to unleash the power to break these chains apart.

But beware because the system can come in many shapes and forms. To creep silently behind, just like a tiger preying upon his prey. It can attack without warning. It will grip the life out of you, and then when you succeed the many hardships of accomplishments and achievements — brighter days have prevailed. But if you don't let that knowledge and wisdom guide you that snake grip will eventually overcome you.

Let the system take its course regardless of their many unlawful and prejudice acts, because without those intact you wouldn't be the person you are right now. So you say what does the system owe me? "Nothing," because it gave me knowledge and wisdom and above all a contribution to The Beat Within.

How can we truly decide how we can make things better? We need to recognize the creativity and intellect that our young people bring to this world. We need to recognize their gift and their passion and their own attributes with which they all have something to contribute in this world.

check out the rest of Salvador's BWO piece on page 71